New HSR Plan a Non-Starter

DESSERT DETOUR AS SLOW AS AMTRAK BUS

by Richard F. Tolmach

The latest edition of the High Speed Rail Authority (HSRA) Business Plan released April 2 is available on the Authority website. It is by far the least convincing effort to date.

HSRA has hyped this version as “saving” $30 billion, but plan details show this was achieved by just chopping back high-speed mileage and ignoring the mandate for 2 hour, 40 minute L.A.-S.F. service. For seven years after claiming energy and economic benefits, from 2022 to 2029, neither San Francisco nor Los Angeles will be on the network, and changes of train will be required on both ends.

HSRA seems to have forgotten California’s current problems with connections on the Bakersfield-Los Angeles bus. On a good day, the bus takes only two hours, but that does not make it pleasant. Surveys consistently show passengers want a single seat ride on a through train. Lack of through service is clearly the main impediment to ridership growth on California’s intercity network.

California’s High Speed Rail Authority (HSRA) is so off-track it can’t build a simple 80 mile line to fill the missing link to Santa Clarita, eliminate that bus trip and unify California’s fractured passenger rail network.

Even worse, HSRA refuses to do anything about the Bakersfield-Santa Clarita link for at least 15 years, and once it does, wants it to run the longest, slowest way possible, via Mojave, Palmdale and Soledad Canyon.

No sane motorist drives that way, and fast trains shouldn’t go there either. Bakersfield to Palmdale is 95 miles, the same driving distance as Bakersfield to San Fernando Valley.

Metrolink’s torturous route from Palmdale via Soledad Canyon to L.A. takes 90 minutes. The notion that this single-track line shared by Union Pacific and hemmed in by steep terrain could be, as proposed by the latest plan, upgraded to become part of a high-speed route to Los Angeles is preposterous.

Even a billion dollars spent in Soledad Canyon can’t make trains run at high speed there, and the dangerous high grades on Tehachapi mean total elapsed time from Bakersfield via Palmdale to L.A. will exceed two hours, just like the current Amtrak bus.

Going the long way also undermines all of the claimed energy and economic benefits. Trains running 480 miles via Palmdale suffer a 40 percent mileage penalty compared to airlines with 344 air miles from SFO to LAX. As China learned, 220 mph trains have high energy costs. HSRA has not demonstrated that trains via Palmdale can save any energy.

Leading experts, including Silicon Valley’s William Warren, already have cast doubt that trains can compete against air carriers like Southwest and JetBlue. JetBlue managed to retain 12 cent cost per available seat mile (CASM) and 16 cent passenger-mile cost in spite of today’s fuel prices. By comparison, the leanest high-speed service worldwide is TGV-Southwest with 31 cents per passenger mile, and others cost 40 cents or higher.

HSRA’s inefficient Palmdale route, combined with higher rail costs makes it economically dead on arrival. Airlines are profitable with $100 Bay Area-Los Angeles fares (29 cents per mile) but trains via Palmdale would need S.F.-L.A. fares of at least $150 just to break even.

It is obvious the public won’t agree to pay higher than airfare to ride a train wandering in the desert for 2 hours just to get to Bakersfield, or connecting service that takes 5 hours L.A. to the Bay Area, as the Initial Operating Segment does. The only explanation for profit claims in the 2012 Business Plan is magical thinking, because the Authority makes no credible case for profit in its 212-page report.

Compared to HSRA, Southern California and Bay Area leaders like Supervisor Mike Antonovich and Caltrain’s Mike Scanlon have shown considerable financial talent, figuring out ways to bend Authority funding plans to benefit their local projects.

However, “blended” service that curtails frequency and slows trains on 120 miles of the 480 mile network harms the fiscal viability of the entire proposal and is also illegal.

As former HSRA Chairman Quentin Kopp pointed out, the plan does not conform with AB 3034 mandates on frequency and service to named endpoints. The Plan also violates state laws requiring that operable segments be fully funded and need no public subsidy. It is amply clear that the 480 mile route cannot be run in the mandated 2 hours 40 minutes.

The Authority and its army of consultants have now wasted nearly $1 billion of scarce public funds. They need to be ejected from the gravy train, if California is ever to have progress on its passenger rail network.
SMART BREAKS GROUND ON SONOMA-MARIN UPGRADE

Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit, after a year of hesitation, is now working to open a scaled-back 38.5 mile starter line between Guerneville Rd. in Santa Rosa and downtown San Rafael to open by 2015, with additional segments to operate as funding becomes available. On February 24, a groundbreaking ceremony for the starter segment was held at the historic Northwestern Pacific depot in Petaluma, attracting a crowd of 400.

Costs for the entire network had grown to an estimated $895 million, causing voter concern and a rethink on plans. In January 2011, General Manager Lilian Hames, who led the project for a decade, resigned amid concerns about the rail system’s financial challenges and the necessity to build the system in phases.

A more affordable budget was eventually developed and SMART began actions to put the capital facilities and rolling stock into place. In August of 2011, Farhad Mansourian, who had been acting manager, took over as permanent General Manager. The SMART Board gave final approval to issuance of $171 million of bonds at the same meeting.

SMART has since awarded a $103 million construction contract to be awarded later for the first segment. It is preparing a second contract to be awarded later this spring.

Some critics support the project but are critical of management expenditures. For instance, some have called into question Mansourian’s compensation and benefits package of $346,000 per year, on top of a Marin County pension of $147,600. They contrast his pay with the $320,000 of total compensation BART’s General Manager receives for the same role. They also contrast his pay with the $75 million plus a stipend of $759,000 of SMART for development costs. Mansourian later exercised a $22 million option to buy third cars for the nine sets to be delivered in 2015, to operate the Air Rail Link, an express shuttle between Toronto’s Pearson Airport and Union Station. The stainless-steel cars, which operate in pairs, are able to incorporate a third car in the middle for increased capacity.

Nippon Sharyo’s main work at the plant is an order of 160 bilevel electric multiple unit cars for Metra, to run on the old Illinois Central lines into Chicago.

SMART is now purchasing a 10-acre site to build a maintenance and storage facility for the cars when they arrive next year. SMART has budgeted $20 million for the facility, which will include a shop for vehicle repair and maintenance, outdoor storage and a central dispatching facility.

California’s state rail program is under threat in the FY 2013 state budget, perhaps because the High-Speed Rail Authority (HSRA) and its consultants can’t stand the competition of rail pros making a fraction of their wage levels in state service jobs.

Draft changes expected in Gov. Brown’s May revision would slash about three-quarters of positions in the Caltrans Division of Rail, which currently oversees and analyzes Amtrak California service. Despite a record amount of funding for intercity rail capital improvements in state and federal budgets, the unit faces cuts in staff that will cripple efforts to improve service in the next five years, including planned new frequencies on the Pacific Surfliner and San Joaquin routes.

The cuts also have the unfortunate effect of silencing voices who might oppose HSRA’s ridiculous plans, suggest better ideas. However, late-breaking news has suggested other possible reasons for the budget axe.

One is that county participants in the LOSSAN Advisory Committee are trying to form a joint powers board and take over Pacific Surfliner route planning. Senator Alex Padilla (D-Van Nuys) has introduced SB 1225 as a vehicle to advance the takeover.

This bill, until December 31, 2013, would authorize the department and a joint powers board established for the purpose of assuming responsibility for the Pacific Surfliner intercity rail corridor to enter into an agreement under similar terms and conditions.

In parallel, AC Transit is trying to persuade San Joaquin Valley counties to create a joint powers board to manage the San Joaquin Valley counties to create a joint powers board to manage the San Joaquin Route. The Department of Finance is certainly aware of the eagerness of local agencies to lay claim to state resources, but Finance is unlikely to want to help. Slashing positions may make it hard to defend the Division of Rail less of an easy target.

Meanwhile, Chairwoman Mar DeSaulnier (D-Concord), of the Senate Transportation and Housing Committee, introduced SB 1117. “This bill will provide for a comprehensive long-term statewide passenger rail plan,” said DeSaulnier. “It is expected to be reviewed by the committee this spring.

The bill puts the California Transportation Commission in charge of an annual planning process for high-speed rail, conventional Intercity rail, commuter rail, and urban rail transit. The bill foresees a process involving hearings that would lead to an adopted plan by September 2014.

Join TRAC and Help Fight for Improved Trains

Clip & mail with your check or money order payable to:
Train Riders Association of California (TRAC)
1025 Ninth St. #223 Sacramento, CA 95814-3516 (916) 557-1667

Please fill out the following or attach address label:

**California Rail News January-April 2012**
Senate Pushes Re-Regulation of Commute Railroads by STB

A recently passed U.S. Senate bill on rail transportation, S. 1813 Title VI – National Rail System title also: Subtitle F, Sec. 36105 and 36207. The National Rail System title also: requires forces to consign their Next Generation intercity rail rolling stock over to a newly created bureaucracy controlled by Amtrak under a national “Cooperative Equipment Pool” corporate entity. This provision, “Sec 36105 Cooperative Equipment Pool,” would effectively remove all decision-making from states in favor of Amtrak’s national rail needs and further stack the deck in favor of Amtrak’s interests. Amtrak President Joseph Boardman is highly favorable to them on commuter services. Amtrak’s national rail needs and further stack the deck in favor of Amtrak’s interests. Amtrak President Joseph Boardman is highly favorable to them on commuter services.

For example, the bill would reverse never-implemented reforms contained in Section 207 of PRIIA allowing states to make use of alternate private operators instead of Amtrak for state-supported service, by making them nearly cost-prohibitive. The bill would have largely the same impact upon commuter carriers. Metrolink, Coast Starlight, and ACE all would be hurt financially, if the measure passes the House of Representatives in its current form. S. 1813, which now goes to the House for action, would expand powers and duties of federal bureaucracy to regulate and override the decisions of every commuter and intercity rail transportation system in the nation. It even could wipe out Amtrak’s proposed California high-speed rail network if it doesn’t use Amtrak for all operating duties. A new subtitle (Subtitle F) was added to the National Rail System title to empower the Surface Transportation Board (STB) to write new “Licensing and Insurance Requirements” regulations for all commuter and state passenger rail carriers and their contractors except Amtrak.

The STB is prohibited by the bill from streamlining the regulatory process and is forbidden to exempt any rail carrier from a costly and time consuming new “licensing” mandate and new insurance requirements above and beyond present day limits. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office has determined that Subtitle F in particular affixes an “Unfunded Mandate” on rail carriers that transport passengers” largely due to the unlimited authority and regulatory reach granted to the STB to write new, more expensive rules. For example, STB receives unprecedented and unlimited power over insurance and liability policies and no local or state rail authority can escape STB’s jurisdiction.

The STB has unlimited discretion to suspend or cancel, without cause, the certificate of any passenger rail carrier or punish a rail carrier by mandating excessive individual insurance requirements at the behest of outside special interests. Only Amtrak is exempted from the new licensing regime or risk being free to charge far higher rates to regional and state rail authorities with impunity. This means, for example, that any change of ownership of a new operator coming to run a California high-speed rail system would be out of the question.

A new government-sanctioned local and national rail monopoly will stifle new and expand passenger rail transportation and at worst will cause interstate and commuter rail authorities to reduce or cancel rail service as the decisions of every commuter and intercity rail transportation system in the nation.

HSR CHAIRMAN DAN RICHARD in his Fresno launch of the latest draft Business Plan on April 2 still make the trip from S.F. to L.A. in 2 hours 40 minutes, but experts say the “blended” network is no longer capable of running. STATE AUDITOR Elaine Howle says the High Speed Rail Authority split an information technology contract in two separate bids to fulfill bidding requirements, and gave $3.1 million to one little-known Sacramento vendor over 15 months, mostly for software and maintenance duties... HIGH-SPEED REVOLVING DOORS as rail consulting firms and government agencies are now in a position to call the tune for HSRA’s project, as a consultant ever, with Gregy Al טיול, former Deputy Secretary of BT&I moving first to Parsons Brinckerhoff, then to a position as deputy director at the High Speed Rail Authority... MEANWHILE Dan Leavitt, formerly of PB, then in the position Albright now occupies at HSRA, became a contractor to Amtrak for a project with persuading counties to form a JPA and take over the San Joaquin service... DAN RICHARD, the former BART director and PG&E executive, worked for HSRA contractor Parsons Transportation Group before becoming Jerry Brown’s appointee to the HSRA Board... NEIL PETERSEN, formerly of LA Metro, is thought to be working for Parsons Brinckerhoff but is also being mooted as the next CEO of the HSRA... ROELOF VAN ARK, originally with Siemens, then Alstom, then CEO of HSRA, says he expects to still be working in 2013... QUENTIN KOPP, former HSRA Chairman, calls the current version of the high-speed business plan “the greatest train robbery” in the Orange County Register. Kopp... ROELOF VAN ARK, CEO of HSRA, calls the current version of the high-speed business plan “the greatest train robbery” in the Orange County Register. Kopp... BART Director and PG&E executive, worked for HSRA contractor Parsons Transportation Group before becoming Jerry Brown’s appointee to the HSRA Board... NEIL PETERSEN, formerly of LA Metro, is thought to be working for Parsons Brinckerhoff but is also being mooted as the next CEO of the HSRA... ROELOF VAN ARK, originally with Siemens, then Alstom, then CEO of HSRA, says he expects to still be working in 2013... QUENTIN KOPP, former HSRA Chairman, calls the current version of the high-speed business plan “the greatest train robbery” in the Orange County Register. Kopp... ROELOF VAN ARK, CEO of HSRA, calls the current version of the high-speed business plan “the greatest train robbery” in the Orange County Register. Kopp...
By Richard F. Tolmach

Jerry Brown put Chinese high-speed rail technology on the California agenda in late February via meetings with Vice President Xi Jinping and Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. In a remarkable interview the same week, Ruedi van Ark, departing CEO of the High Speed Rail Authority (HSRA), gave an unqualified endorsement of China’s controversial new high-speed trains. The trains are suspected of having been largely reverse-engineered from Japanese and European high-speed trains sold to China.

The Governor said he hoped to persuade Chinese investors to consider California projects instead of Treasury bills. He told reporters his recent appointment to the HSRA, Mike Rossi, is handling creation of a group of private interests in California that would collaborate with counterparts in China. Brown also announced his intention to lead a trade delegation to China later this year.

Is Chinese HSR a Positive Model?

It is no surprise that Brown’s opening to China comes as the reputation of China’s railways, boosted by opening of Beijing-Shanghai high-speed line in June last year, has gradually turned to one of corruption run amok. Official Chinese reports cite reversals and political change in the Ministry of Railways (MOR) as the root cause of recent crashes, viaduct collapses, fiscal fraud, signalling failures, power outages and other performance shortcomings.

Lai Zhijun, the railway minister who led the campaign to build nearly 5,000 miles of high-speed railway within seven years, was subsequently put on trial for corruption. His successor, Shangguan, his deputy who controlled R&D and high-speed rail contracts with western companies, was taken into custody soon after. A year later, the same insinuates appear to be in place to make the new rail a model to avoid.

The Beijings described elaborate hurdles out of the way to ensure the construction will continue and that the train will be provided with the requisite technical and finance support. This scheme appears to be a model that the California HSRA has already adopted. According to a June dispatch on China’s Central Intelligence News, the project for the Central Intelligence (RFQ) managed to exclude all German, French and Japanese firms, and selected a random group of Spanish and American contractors, some tainted by their participation in the 2008 financial crisis and some relatively unknown firms which lack requisite technical or financial support.

A China/California Connection?

Peter Lee wrote in the Asian Times last month, “There is a strong desire of the citizens of high-speed rail and Chinese involvement acidly pointed out that China’s railway already has a presence in Los Angeles.” Zhang Shuangxu, 10 years before being arrested, “sought to have by now purchased a massive miles-long viaducts at Shuangshan made any sense whatsoever. The photo at left, which shows a massive viaduct, and the right, shows a section of the Shuang Dun viaduct posted on the Internet of the site does not convince one that residents of these condos learned HSR was coming when construction crews arrived. ©2011 AFP/Getty Images

Residents of these condos learned HSR was coming when construction crews arrived. ©2011 AFP/Getty Images

 Residents of these condos learned HSR was coming when construction crews arrived. ©2011 AFP/Getty Images

Here’s what high-speed rail looks like without “inefficient” environmental regulations like CEQA.

In China’s process, nobody ever had to explain the purpose of three separate viaducts. Nobody had to revise the project to respond to public concerns about noise, safety, or visual impacts.

Jennifer Bichu, a Twitter user, posted to the HSRA a photo of her apartment building, where a massive miles-long viaducts at Shuangshan, made any sense whatsoever. The photo at left, which shows a massive viaduct, and the right, shows a section of the Shuang Dun viaduct posted on the Internet of the site does not convince one that residents of these condos learned HSR was coming when construction crews arrived. ©2011 AFP/Getty Images

Residents of these condos learned HSR was coming when construction crews arrived. ©2011 AFP/Getty Images

Here’s what high-speed rail looks like without “inefficient” environmental regulations like CEQA.

In China’s process, nobody ever had to explain the purpose of three separate viaducts. Nobody had to revise the project to respond to public concerns about noise, safety, or visual impacts.
the regions between the Upper Rhine and Marseille,” said Dr. Grube, “but also in just be felt in the Rhine-Main area and Bahn, speaking on the inaugural journey. said Dr. Rüdiger Grube, CEO of Deutsche we are setting another milestone in our the link between Frankfurt and Marseille, was inaugurated March 23, following ear-

“Rhine-Rhône” link is as an express route to Munich and from Frankfurt to Paris,” said Barbara Dalibard, General Director of SNCF. “For people on both sides of the border, this marks a new, environmentally friendly way to travel more quickly to the South of France,” continued Dalibard. Because the routing is at least half on conventional speed trackage, DB and SNCF have come up with very attractive offers to promote the new link. A one-way journey on the route between Germany and the Mediterranean is available from as little as 39 euros in 2nd class or 69 euros in 1st class. The second class fares represent about 10 cents per passenger mile, far below normal German or French tariffs. DB and SNCF are paying special atten-

tion to on-board service, with an interna-
tional train team looking after passengers throughout the entire journey. On interna-
tional journeys with travel times of more than an hour, passengers in 1st class benefit from an exclusive service package which also includes a snack.


The northbound departs Marseille at 08:14, Aix-en-Provence at 08:23, Avignon at 08:51, Lyon at 10:04, Mulhouse at 12:56 and Strasbourg at 13:54, and arrives Baden-

Bayern has to be ignored; indeed, the Metro stations should be constructed in these loca-
sions. By ignoring the large potential rider-

ship that the dense multifamily residen-
tial, high rise commercial, and numer-
ous retail buildings just west of Federal provides. Metro is planning a station that will be permanently flaved, not serving Westside stakeholders adequately.

Even if an additional “Subway to the Sea” extension is built eventually, Metro has clearly indicated that no station would built between the VA and Bundy, missing the dense cluster of residents and jobs along Barrington, Federal, and San Vicente. A better solution that could save money and increase ridership would be to build the VA Station on the south side of Wilshire, but with the station box and underground platforms to the west of Bonsall. This would still allow a portal on the east side of Bonsall at the northern edge of the parking lot, with close access to the VA Hospital, and it would also allow the following additional benefits:

• A second portal to the west, within close pedestrian range of Federal Avenue, enabling a substantial increase in ridership.

• Construction of crossover tracks imme-
diately adjacent to the east of the sta-
tion, reducing the cost by eliminating an extra construction staging area east of the I-405 Freeway.

• A gentler curve with a wider radius between the Westwood Boulevard and VA Stations, increasing speeds, reduc-
ing travel times, and reducing wear and tear on the tracks and train equip-
ment.

• The proposed Constellation subway station box.

Metro needs to be more flexible. Just because the station needs to be within Westwood does not mean that access to Brentwood has to be ignored; indeed, the FEIR/FEIS explicitly references access to this station by bus patrons beyond Westwood, but access for pedes-
trians nearby. Perhaps a solution could be to approve the FEIR/FEIS and then conduct a Supplemental EIR/FEIS for the VA Station so that planning can proceed without delay.

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa announced that Phase 1 of Los Angeles’s eagerly-

 Waited Expo Line will open to the public on Saturday, April 28. Villaraigosa said, there will be free rides on opening day.

Under regular service, trains will run every 12 minutes, according to Metro officials. Travel time between 7th/Metro Center in Downtown L.A. and the interim endpoint La Cienega station will be under 30 minutes.

Metro officials also said problems with the signal systems at the junction of Blue and Expo Line tracks at Washington and Fower seem to be resolved. Signals were delaying trains from going through the junction, thereby making it hard to create an accurate and dependable schedule.

Work on the Phase I endpoint Culver City station continues and testing still needs to be done on the segment of track between La Cienega and Culver City. Metro officials are hopeful that the line will be completed by summer by sum-

A single daily round trip using Alstom Euroduplex double-deck TGV trains to link Frankfurt with the South of France was inaugurated March 23, following ear-

lier events celebrating opening of the line.

The primary use of the new high-speed “Rhine-Rhône” line is as an express route from Zürich and Basel to Paris, cutting Zürich-Paris travel to 3 hours.

However, the new line also provides a popular service for Germans. It short-

ens travel times between south-west Germany and the South of France by up to 90 minutes providing a 7-3/4 hour trip for the 500 mile run. South of Lyon, the trains use the TOV-Mediterrannée line.

“Rail traffic in Europe is taking another step towards becoming more internation-
al and even more customer-oriented. With the link between Frankfurt and Marseille, we are setting another milestone in our successful collaboration with SNCF”, said Dr. Rüdiger Grube, CEO of Deutsche Bahn, speaking on the inaugural journey.

“The benefits of this link will not just be felt in the Rhine-Main area and Marsseille,” said Dr. Grube, “but also in the regions between the Upper Rhine and the South of France, which will achieve greater integration into the European long-distance transport network.”

“The Rhine-Rhône link marks the beginning of a new chapter in German-French high-speed rail transport, which will be operated jointly by DB and SNCF. It is part of a series of successful offers including routes from Paris via Stuttgart to Munich and from Frankfurt to Paris,” said Barbara Dalibard, General Director of SNCF Voyages and member of the board at SNCF. “For people on both sides of the border, this marks a new, environmentally friendly way to travel more quickly to the South of France,” continued Dalibard.

Because the routing is at least half on conventional speed trackage, DB and SNCF have come up with very attractive offers to promote the new link. A one-way journey on the route between Germany and the Mediterranean is available from as little as 39 euros in 2nd class or 69 euros in 1st class. The second class fares represent about 10 cents per passenger mile, far below normal German or French tariffs. DB and SNCF are paying special atten-

A single daily round trip using Alstom Euroduplex double-deck TGV trains to link Frankfurt with the South of France was inaugurated March 23, following earlier events celebrating opening of the line.

The primary use of the new high-speed ‘Rhine-Rhône’ line is as an express route from Zürich and Basel to Paris, cutting Zürich-Paris travel to 3 hours.

However, the new line also provides a popular service for Germans. It shortens travel times between south-west Germany and the South of France by up to 90 minutes providing a 7-3/4 hour trip for the 500 mile run. South of Lyon, the trains use the TOV-Mediterrannée line.

“Rail traffic in Europe is taking another step towards becoming more international and even more customer-oriented. With the link between Frankfurt and Marseille, we are setting another milestone in our successful collaboration with SNCF," said Dr. Rüdiger Grube, CEO of Deutsche Bahn, speaking on the inaugural journey.

“The benefits of this link will not just be felt in the Rhine-Main area and Marseille,” said Dr. Grube, “but also in the regions between the Upper Rhine and the South of France, which will achieve greater integration into the European long-distance transport network.”

“The Rhine-Rhône link marks the beginning of a new chapter in German-French high-speed rail transport, which will be operated jointly by DB and SNCF. It is part of a series of successful offers including routes from Paris via Stuttgart to Munich and from Frankfurt to Paris,” said Barbara Dalibard, General Director of SNCF. “For people on both sides of the border, this marks a new, environmentally friendly way to travel more quickly to the South of France,” continued Dalibard.

Because the routing is at least half on conventional speed trackage, DB and SNCF have come up with very attractive offers to promote the new link. A one-way journey on the route between Germany and the Mediterranean is available from as little as 39 euros in 2nd class or 69 euros in 1st class. The second class fares represent about 10 cents per passenger mile, far below normal German or French tariffs. DB and SNCF are paying special attention to on-board service, with an international train team looking after passengers throughout the entire journey. On international journeys with travel times of more than an hour, passengers in 1st class benefit from an exclusive service package which also includes a snack.


Since the German-French high-speed rail network was put into operation in June 2007, it has attracted about six million international passengers. There was a 4 percent growth from 2010 to 2011.

On the route between Stuttgart and Paris, rail traffic is 25 percent of the air-rail market. Between Frankfurt and Paris, rail has about 25 percent of the air-rail market. Between Frankfurt and Paris, rail has about 25 percent of the air-rail market.

SNCF has expanded its order of 55 Euroduplexes currently being delivered, with a follow-on order of 30 more trains. The additional sets will be delivered from 2015. Their cars will be built at Alstom Transport’s La Rochelle site. Some of these train sets are designed to also run in Spain. Benefitting from Alstom’s unique and long experience in the high-speed rail market, Euroduplex trains offer the lowest operating cost per corridor and the highest return per seat.
Loeb, attorneys for the kings, sent a 6-page letter to the City of Sacramento. At the end of March, Loeb & Loeb also asked for “an opinion from the City’s independent bond counsel as to whether the City, in light of the ongoing initiative drive and potential vote, can issue bonds in conjunction with any aspect of the ESC project, including the parking monetization plan or the refinancing of the existing arena.” Sacramento city activists have independently raised doubts on finance.

City bought from UP via a now-bankrupt intermediary. The design blocks pedestrian access to distant rail platforms, forces relocation of the depot, and makes getting to Amtrak nearly impossible during events.

The firm observed, “construction alone will result in significant GHG emissions” that will have to be offset. Your letter does not explain how this can be done.

The firm also pointed out that “using the City’s own assumptions, the new arena will result in approximately 360,000 additional vehicle trips per year, or, a 60% increase in GHG emissions associated with vehicles, even if 25% of the attendees use mass transportation. Given the large amount of GHG emissions associated with the construction and the large increase in emissions associated with vehicle traffic, we fail to see how the City will be able to demonstrate that there is no increase.”

The firm also pointed out further impacts from GHG problems, citing Sacramento contractor AECom’s observation that “the City’s General Plan Policy now states that the City shall work with CARB to comply with AB 32 reductions to 1990 emission levels by 2020 which equates to a 29% reduction in emissions compared to ‘business-as-usual’ conditions. Given that the construction of the arena is likely to result in increased, rather than decreased emissions, the project will likely be inconsistent with the General Plan Policy.”

Loeb & Loeb continued, “As you are aware, a day after the March 20th meeting, the organizers of STOP filed a notice to put the following measure to a public vote in November 2012. The City shall provide no financial support for the development of an Entertainment and Sports Complex (ESC) in the Downtown Railyards site without the approval of a majority of voters.”

“The fact that this initiative drive is occurring makes it impossible for the City to provide current assurances that its funding plan is feasible,” according to Loeb & Loeb. “If STOP obtains enough signatures to require a vote (which may not be known until the end of June), the seminal question of whether the City can provide any funds… may well not be answered until November after the vote occurs and then only if the voters reject the measure.”

“Given that as recently as November 2006, voters rejected by a 3-to-1 margin using City funding for an arena in the same general area, we have a tremendous concern that the City funding plan and timeline are not feasible and that the parties will be wasting significant time and resources in a futile endeavor,” said the law firm.

Loeb & Loeb also asked for “an opinion from the City’s independent bond counsel as to whether the City, in light of the ongoing initiative drive and potential vote, can issue bonds in conjunction with any aspect of the ESC project, including the parking monetization plan or the refinancing of the existing arena.” Sacramento city activists have independently raised doubts on finance.

Response from Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson and Senate President Pro-Tem Darryl Steinberg was instant and hostile, targeting the Maloofs as the problem. The Mayor started talking about regime change for the Kings and threatening that the NBA would hand their franchise to other owners if the Maloofs did not cooperate. Steinberg also let slip that he had framed AB 900 to avoid full environmental analysis of toxic problems at the Railyards site.

Sacramento blogger Paul Ciegg asked the key question, “did our mayor really have a deal, or was he just trying to keep momentum going for an arena in the face of growing opposition at home?” Other voices point out the Kings are only tenants in the deal, which primarily benefits Anschutz.

Ciegg said, “vilification of the Maloofs … seems remarkable similar to the machinations in 2006, when backers of a new arena were trying to get a sales tax hike approved by voters. They assured the public all parties had agreed on a deal, then reacted angrily when the Maloofs raised objections. The tax measure was defeated by a four-to-one margin.”

The Sacramento County Grand Jury, in its searing 2007 report castigating local Sacramento politicians for its dishonesty about Measures Q & R: “The public was led to believe that there had been a deal made and that only some minor adjustments were required to finalize it. Had a deal been made as outlined, the city and county were ready to give away the entire revenue stream from the facility being proposed and pay for the facility. In fact there was no deal and never had been.”

With the Sacramento deal in a shambles again, the Kings are looking at better offers in Anaheim and Seattle. However, that doesn’t mean better conditions soon for Sacramento Amtrak passengers. Union Pacific, having already been paid by the City to clear tracks from the arena template, reportedly will cut existing station tracks this summer and start forcing passengers to walk 1100 feet to isolated platforms.

Whatever the outcome, the prognosis for Amtrak ridership in Sacramento is not good.
The California Rail Foundation was founded in 1987 to promote modern rail and bus technology, including high-speed rail. Since that time, we have updated California Rail News and cosponsored an annual conference that educates on rail, Cal Rail 2020. We never believed it would be easy to build California high-speed rail, but we underestimated just how much fraud mega-projects apparently attract. The project now has a broken budget because of tens of billions of dollars already spent. This has created a new rail corridor, and the state has already invested $1 billion in the project. The project is now facing many challenges, and the California Rail Foundation has been working to help ensure that the project is successful. The California Rail Foundation has been working to ensure that the project is successful. We believe that it is essential to build a modern rail system to meet the needs of our state and to provide a competitive alternative to our existing transportation system. We are committed to supporting this important project and are working to ensure that it is successful. Please help us by donating today.