Carpooling, bicycling, telecommuting, and using public transportation are back in vogue, with lots of new converts. Setting the style, Google has created a special section of its website to allow web users to make travel plans using public transit.

More elected officials and candidates need to accept the new reality we’re all living and emphasize passenger rail and transit as the best things to help mitigate oil prices while simultaneously promoting jobs, transit oriented growth, and helping the environment.

With gas prices continuing to escalate for a variety of reasons; international political unrest in some countries, the declining dollar, increasing oil demand from China and India, and speculation from commodities traders, many market observers believe that $4/gallon gasoline will be a fact of life influencing lifestyles and investments. Not to be overlooked, prices for diesel fuel went all the way to $5 before softening, and along the way resulted in higher prices for food at grocery stores and restaurants.

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Trains are already full and who knows how high gasoline prices will go?

Ridership on mass transit, commuter trains and Amtrak has been spiking at the same rate as oil, and in the past month both have set all-time records in California. With a major election approaching, trains have been getting more attention from elected officials across the country.

The new reality is that the days of cheap gas are over. Demand is so strong that the Department of Energy said that opening up the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) would only cause oil prices to drop by only 75 cents per barrel.

Even a trip by President Bush to Saudi Arabia to plead for increased oil output has failed to help stabilize oil prices.

Among long-distance commuters, there is no comfort left in depending on cheap gas, and looming environmental and climate issues are too strong a concern for more people to jump onto consuming more fossil fuels. Habits and lifestyles, especially daily commutes, are in flux.

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(continued on Page Two)
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Five variations of an all-Santa Monica Blvd. subway, two additional variations of the Wilshire-Santa Monica subway and all three aerial options (including a monorail option) were rejected.

Metro attributed their selection to capacity considerations: A six-car heavy rail train could carry as much as 14,000 people per hour per direction according to Metro. In contrast, a three-car light rail train carries about 7,600, while monorail carries 6,300 and BRT 1,800.

Capital costs of building the projects were also described. Either an all-Wilshire or all-Santa Monica subway would cost about $5.5 billion, while a combined subway would cost $8 billion.

The aerial options would have cost as much as an underground subway once the mitigation expenses were added, totaling $6.5 billion, according to Metro. All of these options would have satisfied Federal Transit Administration cost-effectiveness requirements.

Metro also considered the environmental impacts of aerial rail. Of note, while monorail appeared to use the least amount of air space for its guideway compared to the heavy and light rail options, its stations would consume much of the street width.

Metro took the relatively new Las Vegas Monorail as an example of expected station design. A lack of space for a new maintenance yard was also a concern. The Metro Red and Purple Lines already benefit from a high-capacity maintenance yard just south of Union Station.

Metro ultimately concluded that any aerial rail would have environmental issues that would outweigh any apparent benefits and cost savings from building a subway. Metro felt that the highly traveled Wilshire and Santa Monica corridors would not benefit from the lower-capacity light rail and monorail options.

Another raid threatens to undermine the ridership successes that have boosted transit systems across the state. Just three blocks from the Capitol, for example, Sacramento’s light-rail system saw a 43 percent jump in riders in April. Meanwhile, other agencies are considering raising fares just to keep up with increased fuel costs. Already, Metrolink in Los Angeles is set to increase fares by more than 5 percent. This increase already includes a previously enacted 3.5 percent annual increase and reflects rising fuel costs.

Participants believed that the governor is presenting the raid into Spillover money as a false dilemma of attending to transit needs at the expense of keeping teachers in schools or similar. However, most recognized that plugging the $15 billion state budget deficit by some other fashion will be a daunting task.

Some participants took on an environmental approach, stating that fully funding current and additional transit would help the state meet its goals of reducing pollution as set out in Assembly Bill 32, which was signed into law in 2006. A recent report by Environment California concluded that both public transit and transit-oriented development can fulfill two of seven key strategies to reduce greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, a major catalyst of global warming.

Gas Pains

Sales of SUV’s have tanked and the numbers of new registered vehicles in California has also been declining according to the State Controller’s Office, a major factor in California’s declining tax revenues.

Also, the specific dimensions of the real estate bubble have become more visible, as exurban developments in most cases have lost much more value than city center properties. Where there is no affordable transit access, the fall in value in properties is even more extreme.

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

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Renewal
New Member

By Numan Parada
With the prospect of $4-a-gallon gasoline becoming reality and citizens flocking to buses and trains in record numbers, transit advocates took their case to Sacramento and asked lawmakers to preserve money intended for public transportation.

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and the state legislature last year voted to cut $1.26 billion of public transit funding from the public transit account for the current fiscal year. In doing so, they also wrote into law that they would not divert more than 50 percent of the so-called Spillover fund in the future.

The Spillover is a special fund for public transit operations when gas prices rise faster than inflation.

“Last year, I think it’s fair to say that the budget was balanced on the back of public transportation,” Emily Rusch of CalPIRG noted to the Bay Area News Service.

However, the proposed budget is considering cutting public transit funds by the same amount this year. Advocates want Schwarzenegger and lawmakers to uphold the vow they codified as they debate the customary revise of the state budget during May. To that end, a group of advocacy organizations went to the Capitol on May 20 to lobby against raiding the Spillover account.

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The public has expressed overwhelming support towards the subway options, with massive preference towards a Wilshire alignment. With such support no longer questioned, participants were all reassessed on how to make the project a reality.

The meetings attracted approximately 1,000 people total and has so far elicited 750 public comments. In addition, Metro continues to give briefings on the study to various agencies and participate in privately organized meetings on the subject.

The final round of public meetings for the Alternatives Analysis Study are tentatively planned for August 2008. These meetings will provide the public with an opportunity to review the latest comments prior to presentation to the Metro Board of Directors.
For fiscal year 2009, President Bush proposed reducing Amtrak’s funding from this year’s amount of $1.325 billion down to $800 million while proposing $100 million to match states’ investments in passenger rail. Amtrak’s funding request was $1.671 billion. Not included in their request is $114 million for the 60% of back pay the President’s Emergency Board (PEB) recommended that Amtrak pay its employees, without any of Amtrak’s proposed work rule changes. Amtrak went with the PEB recommendations to avert a strike. On public transit, the President has proposed cutting the funding by $202.1 million and having an additional $3.2 billion transferred to highway projects.

In March, the Senate confirmed Nancy Naocomo and Thomas Carper to the Amtrak Board of Directors and approved a budget resolution that includes $1.8 billion for Amtrak $250 million in matching state grants.

The House proposed its own version of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (Senate version was S.294) in early May. H.R.6003 was introduced by T&I Committee chair James Oberstar (D-MN) as well as John Mica (R-FL) and has 41 co-sponsors. The six California Representatives who are supporting the legislation include Grace Napolitano, Ellen Tauscher, Bob Filner, Doris Matsui, Jerry McNerney, and Sam Farr – all Democrats.

On May 22, H.R. 6003 was approved by the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. It reauthorizes Amtrak and provides funding up to $14.4 billion for five years, but also would provide a framework for private turn-key bids for a high-speed rail line on a right-of-way separated from NR Corridor tracks between Washington and New York.

In addition to the funding differences between the House and Senate versions the Senate version addresses on-time performance while the House version omitted it. The Senate bill also has a provision for Amtrak to study bringing back the Pioneer route between Portland and Denver which was purchased by Mike Kropo (R-ID). The House version focuses on the Sunset Limited east of New Orleans. The bill passed the T&I committee and House Majority Leader Steny Goyer (D-MD) said the legislation will be taken up before August summer recess. Also introduced was H.R.6004 which would provide source of financing for high-speed rail.

Also in May, co-sponsor of S.294 Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) introduced a resolution (Senate Res. 557) to recognize National Train Day. It has earned 20 co-sponsors (13 Democrats, 6 Republicans, 1 Independent).

**OIL IS BACK ON THE AGENDA**

Meanwhile, a range of pressures on oil caused record high gasoline prices. $4 gas is variously attributed to the declining value of the dollar, strong demand, political pressures in the Middle East, Nigeria, and Venezuela, and China stockpiling on oil for the summer Olympics. The bottom line is more Americans are having hardships. Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Hillary Clinton (D-NY) advocated a gas tax holiday for the summer driving season. The gas tax funds highway projects and public transit. In regards to the shortfall which is estimated to be up to $9 billion, McCain proposed using money from the general fund to make up the difference and Clinton proposed taxing the oil companies.

The gas tax has increased a flat 18.5 cents for 15 years despite the increased highway construction and maintenance costs which is why the highway trust fund is expected to be in the red next year. Barack Obama (D-IL) and many economists denounced the gas tax holiday as a short term solution which would very briefly lower prices, which would then boost oil use and intensify the problem. The American Public Transit Association (APTA) has also opposed suspending the gas tax because of its negative funding effects on transit.

Another bill that Congressmen James Oberstar and John Mica introduced last May was H.R. 6052, the “Saving Energy Through Public Transportation Act of 2008.” The legislation authorizes $1.7 billion in capital and operating funding for over 2 years to transit agencies that reduce fares or expand services. The distribution of the funds would be under the current urban and rural transit formulas whereas California would continue would be a net donor. The legislation would also help transit agencies in complying with the Clean Air Act by increasing the federal share of clean fuel and alternative fuel transit bus, ferry or locomotive-related equipment facilities from the current 90% to 100%.

Another provision in H.R. 6052 is to expand the federal transit pars program to all federal employers throughout the nation. Currently only federal employees in the D.C. metro area receive transit passes from their employers. Also the legislation would expand the Federal share of parking facilities at end-of-line fixed guided way stations from 80% to 100%. Currently the bill has 20 co-sponsors including California Representatives: Mica, Filner, Ellen Tauscher, Henry Waxman, and Grace Napolitano.

**METROLINK WON A COURT BATTLE**

June 3 regarding its push/pull train service. State approval occurred in the guise of finding that federal law and regulations approving push/pull trains preclude plaintiffs from making a claim for negligence by Metrolink. Supporting briefs were filed by Caltrain, ACE, Amtrak, Caltrains and Coaster.

MEGABUS WENT EAST as high energy costs and lightweight ridership on its four West Coast routes with a Los Angeles Union Station hub convinced it to revamp the route to the Northeast. The last bus to run was a Bay Area-Los Angeles trip in June. Its Northwest service links Boston, Buffalo, and Washington with New York. Megabus did demonstrate in California many innovations Amtrak could use including selling ultra-low prices for advanced purchase of excess seats, and low-overhead accounting...

**THE LONG-AWAITED JOINT METROLINK-AMTRAK TICKET MACHINES ARE NOW IN PLACE, with Amtrak ticketing activated but it is no easier than before to buy a through Metrolink-Amtrak ticket.**

**DENISE DUCHENY (D-Chula Vista) amended her SB 53 to advocate a restructuring of current state government under a new Department of Railroads that would report to the Secretary of Business Transportation and Housing. Californians for Rail Authority would finally receive administrative oversight under the change...**

**BILL BRONTE, CALTRANS RAIL CHIEF has a 9-month assignment to the Trade Corridor project funded by Proposition 1B. Bronte will oversee negotiations with UP and BNSF on Donner Pass, Techachapi, and Port of Oakland projects. Crowns Landing and Shafter intermodal projects are also on the agenda...**

**CALTRANS MANAGER LAM NGUYEN, a veteran of the CSUS Caltrans Executive Management Leadership Program, is expected to make a transition in liaison with Bronte. Nguyen is well known to many in the Los Angeles area from close work with transit agencies there during a posting dealing with District 07 transit planning...**

**LOS ANGELES METRO OFFICIALS took a close look at the Metrolink transit and found the train and its transit-oriented projects very enjoyable.**

**See his travelbug at www.caltrainnews.com**
Airline Business Model Broken by Aviation Fuel Pricing

By Richard Tolmach

In the past eight years, airlines worldwide have only shown a profit two years, in 2000 and 2002. The industry has been in a prolonged downturn, and the even the 2007 net profit of $3.6 billion appears to be a short-term recovery.

The price of jet fuel has become such a factor in the financial success of airlines that even the technique of fuel hedging practiced by Southwest and JetBlue has not saved them from severe setbacks. Hedging only works if you buy futures when a market is down.

Two straight quarters of loss for US airlines have hammered stock prices, even those of innovative newcomers. Sitting next to the top five best U.S. air carriers are being viewed as junk by the market.

Legacy carriers are in deep trouble, some after just having emerged from bankruptcy. It is possible that some cities like San Francisco, Los Angeles, Orange County, Riverside, and San Bernardino all had successful commuter trains before gas prices went sky-high. California’s intercity corridor trains operated by Amtrak are the 2nd, and 7th strongest routes in the nation.

Especially since 2006, the public has veered off its feet, taking feet off the gas pedal and walking over modern California trains. That is real progress, but government has to react eventually to follow the lead of the people.

The biggest problem in California is that our railway infrastructure lags behind that of much of the third world. Nations like China, Bulgaria, Iran, Morocco, South Korea and Pakistan have the capability to cut and save money by taking the railroad passenger cars per capita that California does. That means crowding will continue until the state finds extra equipment to grow capacity.

It is fortunate that the legislature and Governor Schwarzenegger put $4 billion into rail Proposition 18, the omnibus bond measure for extra equipment sooner than California U.S. operators will be receiving new equipment that will be in Europe predominantly contract for a single investment by the state.

The most important thing is that the rise in financial viability of modern California trains is widely appreciated than those of the 1980’s Sumitomo gallery cars.

However, a strategy of establishing a coordinated, timed network, with hourly service operated by commuter agencies, linking cross-platform to a single rail service in California, may produce benefits much more widely appreciated than those of the 453(k) box lines.

For example, the Pacific Surfliner manages to carry upwards of 10,000 passengers daily on the Los Angeles-Orange County segment, thought to be 5 percent of total commuter traffic. Together with Metrolink, the two rail carriers carry about 12 percent, enough to have a real impact on congestion.

Typically, corridors with 60,000 average daily highway traffic are sufficient to support prosperous intercity rail service, but California has many that approach 200,000. Beyond I-5 in Orange County, these include many that still aren’t part of the state network, such as the San Francisco Peninsula, the Los Angeles-
BULLET TRAIN HITS A SNAG
By Eric Bailey, Times Staff Writer

concerns about running a bullet train close to lum-

cwarming fears, the timing would seem perfect for

where we've indicated we felt this might be work-

derailments occur "fairly often," he said.

safety concerns more fully addressed. Freight-car

sections of the route -- a process that could add

bullet train in Union Pacific's right of way would

California voters will be asked in November to

dable challenge to the project at a key moment.

But five months before voters decide whether

Mehdi Morshed, executive director of the rail authority.

 Critics question why the California High

Union Pacific spokesman, quoted in the

For the high-speed railroad to work, the route

Both Union Pacific and the California Rail Foundation

California voters will be asked in November

with grade separations and barriers that keep the

high-speed rail line in the U.S. -- could overcome

California Rail News
July-August 2008

As a road-takes-precedence state, California's concerns with high-speed rail is utterly bogus. Some are saying 'the sky is falling, the sky is falling,' but it is not," said Mehdi Morshed, executive director of the rail authority.

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Union Pacific has put in writing what

critics say is nothing more than a propaganda piece.

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A SPEEDING TRAIN LOADED

With Big Questions:

Answers are Needed Before November

Contra Costa Times editorial June 13, 2008

BOONDOGGLE EXPRESS

California faces a huge budget shortfall, a weakening economy, a home foreclosure mess, a drought and the threat of a bomb and its expanding ribbons of state money. Tax increases loom even as businesses are downsizing and inflation threatens a come-

back.

Amid all these challenges, California voters will be asked to approve a $10 billion in bonds in November to kick off the $43 billion high-speed-rail system. It’s a high-speed, high-hopes rail line from San Francisco to Los Angeles that is short on plans, progress and pure financial risk.

Of course, $10 billion is only the beginning. Another $23 billion will be sought from a deficit-

ridden federal government. California’s share of that will rise to $14 billion, and we are not the only state raising doubts about the recession. The cost of the high-speed train is estimated at $100 billion, or more, with an additional $7 billion for spur lines to Sacramento and San Diego.

Does anyone who has followed the saga of the Bay Bridge debts really believe the high-speed rail system will cost less than $60 billion, $80 bil-

lion?

But even at $40 billion, this is a boondoggle that would dwarf the Big Dig in Boston and the Bay Bridge freeway connecting.

One might think now by that the high-speed rail plan, construction and investment have been worked out in detail with considerable confidence in their success. Even after estimating $58 million over a decade in planning, that is decidedly not the case.

A week ago, a California Senate panel blew what should have been a winning whistle for voters. In its report questions the financial assumptions made by the California High-Speed Rail Authority and urges new projected cost of $10 billion bond train system.

“Neither the authority’s 2000 business plan nor the 2006 business plan documents discuss the risks that might be associated with the project,” changes the 27-page report by the Senate Transportation and Housing Committee.

The report says the rail authority needs to demonstrate financial transparency and accountabil-

ity. In addition, the report urges CHSSRA to present an updated business plan prior to the November election so that voters are fully aware of financial risks before they vote on the $10 billion bond measure.

These risks go to the heart of the system, including construction costs, ridership, energy savings, profitability and ability to repay investors, cover annual costs and provide a profit. And, the authority says, high-speed rail would be more economically viable than the current.

These are a lot of questionable assumptions.

While there are obvious benefits to a modern high-speed rail system running between the Central Valley and Bay Area, it would make more sense in a more densely populated area like the Boston-to-

New York route. It could be a $40 billion, $60 billion, $80 billion investment, “yet even at $40 billion, this is a boondoggle.”

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Please join TRAC for our annual "California Rail 2020" conference on November 7th to 9th, 2008, in downtown Sacramento, California. This year’s conference will feature President Alex Kummant of Amtrak (photo: above right) and Director Will Kempton of Caltrans, along with a host of other state and regional transportation leaders to discuss issues important to all California rail users.

This year’s agenda will include:

**FRIDAY, November 7, 7 PM to ?:** Welcome reception for attendees and speakers at the home and garden of Richard Tolmach and Ann Dennis at 1730 13th Street, next door to Regional Transit’s 13th St. Station. An exhibition of rail posters and photos will be on display, and all proceeds from art sales go to support the *California Rail News*. Come and get to know your fellow rail advocates in a conducive setting surrounded by art and enjoy hors d’oeuvres and beverages.

**SATURDAY, November 8, 8:30 AM (registration), Conference 9am to 5pm:** Join us at the beautiful Capitol Plaza Ballroom for a full day of interesting speakers. Capitol Plaza is at Ninth and K St, entry at 1025 Ninth Street, 3rd Floor, handicapped accessible by elevator. Presentations are expected to include:

**Amtrak in a new era of oil scarcity.** Our keynote speaker is Amtrak President and CEO Alex Kummant, who will cover the challenges and opportunities facing Amtrak in an era of $4 gas and $5 diesel.

**ACE+Caltrain+Amtrak=Progress** - What could happen with a joint project to rebuild Dumbarton, double-track Altamont, and improve service all the way to Bakersfield.

**California High Speed Rail** - a post-mortem on Prop 1, details of the county-by-county results, and an assessment of what will happen next, featuring both legislative and administration views.

**Were Marin and Sonoma SMART?** – Fresh from a victory or reeling from another defeat, we will hear from SMART supporters what will happen next on the long battle for 101 Corridor trains.

A generous hot lunch buffet will be provided onsite at the Capitol Plaza Ballroom. Vegetarian options available.

**SUNDAY, November 9:** We have made plans for a very pair of special outings starting Sunday morning at 10:30am. Sign up early for the conference and guarantee your access to reservations for either the train tour or the history tour. We will contact you with ticket details.

**Saturday Conference Rates (includes lunch):**

Day-of-event rates for members will be $100, but you can save significantly by being an earlybird! Mail us your check before September 30th and pay only $80. During the month of October, the rate will be $90. (Non-members pay a $25 surcharge and get a TRAC membership at a promotional rate). Make your checks out to *California Rail Foundation*.

**Saturday Light Rail Night Pub Crawl** $10 on day of event includes light rail pass and souvenir Sacramento pub crawl map (but not libations). We will start at the Fox & Goose, site of much of the early citizen planning of the light rail system and proceed to four other rail accessible beer palaces. Talk to Conference staff on Saturday Nov. 8 to sign up.

**Train to the Conference** Check with us on available discounts and planned group travel heading to train-oriented Sacramento. We want to encourage 10-rides. More details available in the next edition of CRN.

**Lodging:** We have worked out a special $80 room rate at the Vagabond Inn (not including taxes) across the street from the Amtrak Station at 3rd & I. These rates are good for Friday to Sunday night. The motel is also next to the State Rail Museum and only five blocks from the conference site. To reserve, call (800) 522-1555 and mention the $80 TRAC conference rate.