In Europe, there is growing awareness that easier passenger access translates very directly into ridership growth. European networks, especially ones that have to compete for traffic, are actively removing barriers and tailoring new equipment for good height match with legacy platforms. New networks are purpose-building exactly height-matched platforms and cars so that wheelchairs, bikes, and strollers can roll straight on and have available space once they get there.

In California, we seem to be retarded several decades, back before politicians cared about senior and handicapped access. Each separate system has its own method, and taken statewide they don’t add up to full mobility for users. There hasn’t even been a statewide public debate about strategies to progress rail networks to full access.

That is a little bit less so on the Peninsula where the Caltrain HSR compatibility blog has at least raised the issue. Richard Mlynarik, an active poster on the site, has expressed the view that California has an opportunity to make major improvements in passenger access and save billions by adopting a standard platform height, one compatible with easy loading from existing California double-deck stock.

He warns that failure by the High Speed Rail Authority to adopt double-deck high speed trains has caused billions of dollars of “SuperSizing at stations, terminals, and yards” which have had to be extended due to projected capacity requirements.

Mlynarik points out that it would be “far better to use the available unconstricted Californian loading gauge and start out double deck (like TGV Duplex) saving over-build costs and later avoiding a sub-optimal kludge to make double deckers work with a wrong height (ie: high) platform.”

He says the best way to do that is entry via the lower level and a connecting corridor at the upper level. Amtrak Superliners, ACE, California Cars, Baby Bullets, Metrolink and Coaster all do this and are basically compatible with a 550 mm (21.8 inch) platform, and new Caltrain and high speed rail equipment could adopt the same height.

On the other hand, if HSRA continues to ignore the rest of the world, California’s rail network could be crippled by incompatibility of platforms everywhere that HSR and conventional trains coexist. According to current plans, this is not just the Peninsula, but also much of Southern California as well as Merced, Fresno, and Bakersfield.

California mobility activists should be pro-active and take the opportunity to get the fair and equal access promised by ADA. Now that we can have 21st century equipment, (see Page 8) ADA activists should ask that FRA also revisit archaic operating regulations like Section 26-D, which bans level access to protect imaginary brakemen riding the sides of imaginary boxcars.
The Skunk Train, the 123-year-old rail line linking Fort Bragg and Willits in the coastal mountains of California, has been saved again. A tourist attraction since the 1970s, the Skunk Train allows riders to view spectacular redwood groves. A recent tunnel collapse, however, put the train’s future in jeopardy until Save the Redwoods League stepped up to provide necessary funds.

The Mendocino Railway, the company that runs the Skunk Train, faced financial problems after a tunnel collapse in April cut the train’s route. Repairs to the tunnel were estimated at $300,000, which the company did not have available. The original railway was constructed in 1885 to haul lumber. It was connected to Willits in 1911, completing a 40-mile run through the coastal forests. In Willits, passengers until 1960 had the opportunity to connect to Northwestern Pacific Railroad trains to Sausalito. The name “Skunk Train” originated in 1925, when railcars which burned aromatic distillate were introduced.

The tunnel that collapsed, Tunnel No. 1, is 13 feet wide, 16 feet high, and 1,100 feet long. After the collapse, a crew worked feverishly to clear it, but concluded the job was too big. The cave-in is thought to be 50 feet wide, 40 feet long, and 30 feet high.

The Mendocino Railway says it spent much of its reserves to clear mud slides after heavy rains in 2006. The company also says it wants $200,000 from local law enforcement, which commandeered trains to search for a criminal in 2011.

When the tunnel collapsed, all of the company’s train equipment was on the Fort Bragg side of the break, leaving only a few short miles of track for trains to run. Several ridership projections. “Promoters expect a $300,000 option from the Mendocino Railway, enough to fix the tunnel. The option, if exercised, would allow Save the Redwoods to establish an easement on the 40-mile route, preserving redwoods and public access. The Mendocino Railway hopes to have the Skunk Train running its full route again by mid-July after tunnel repairs are complete.

The two Republicans had raised concerns over questions had also been raised over the railway’s decision to indefinitely suspend its review of the Xpress West loan application.

“We have been informed that the letter [from the DOT] explains that ‘serious issues persist’ with the XpressWest loan application; that there are ‘significant uncertainties still surrounding the project’; and that, as a result, [the DOT] has ‘decided to suspend further consideration’ of the XpressWest loan request,” say Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-MI) and Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI).

The two Republicans had raised concerns in March regarding the risk to taxpayers over the $5.5 billion Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing loan. Questions had also been raised over ridership projections. “Promoters expect people to drive 50 to 100 miles to get to the station and then get off the freeway, park, and board the train for the final 175 miles to Las Vegas. Nowhere in the world do people drive so far to board a train for such a short trip,” said one critic.

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Coast Observations

CAPITOL CORRIDOR TRAFFIC declines were reported by CCJPA to have “tapered off” in May for the first time since the August 2012 destruction of historic platforms at the Sacramento station, but the route still lost 2,300 passengers compared to May 2012 and revenues were about $150,000 short of projections. CCJPA staff admitted that low-fare school rides, which make up a large portion of May ridership results, indicating that the gain may be short-lived.

Detailed recent data show station boardings continue to underperform at Roseville, Sacramento, Davis, Richmond and Fremont stations, while Silicon Valley stops are up... A $2 billion LAX Line approved in a pair of May and June meetings, ending two decades of pub-
lic debate on the route. Los Angeles County Metro board unani-
mosly approved the Crenshaw Line’s $2.06-billion budget, reportedly the larg-
est line budget in the agency’s history, despite the largely surface route. Walsh Construction and J.F. Shea Co. will share $1.27 billion for construction, and the remainder will be for cars, real estate acqui-
sition, a new maintenance facility and a contingency fund of $160 million.

The 8.5-mile line is partly funded by Los Angeles County’s Measure R, the half-
cents sales tax passed in October 2008. Construction is expected to begin in 2014 with a projected 2019 completion. Weekday ridership is projected to reach 25,000 about the year 2035.

Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas takes credit for spoorhead-
ing the drive for a light rail line. Ridley-

Thomas and South L.A. activists successfully fought to add two stations to the route, including a stop in Leimert Park Village, a hub of African American culture and his-
tory. The Crenshaw Line contractors have agreed to line construction workers from zip codes with low income and chronic unem-
ployment—many of which are in South L.A.

The line is still a work in progress, and although LAX is in its official name, it will not serve the airport. Initially, and perhaps for all time, there will be double-transfers required to get from Downtown to LAX. Metro is now trying to get people to the Airport without transfers anytime in the next decade. One alternative would connect the Crenshaw Line to a facility along 96th Street, where travelers would take a further bus transfer to the terminal.

Metro and Los Angeles World Airports are also working together on another Measure R project that would connect the Crenshaw/LAX Line via either light rail, bus rapid transit and/or people mover. That project is currently scheduled to be competed in the late 2020s and will depend on funding from the City of Los Angeles.

What is rare and expensive in California, like new light rail lines, is commonplace and affordable in France. Alan Drake’s web site: oilfreetransport.blogspot.com indicates the progress various communities have made in oil-free transportation. There is a tremendous amount to report in France.

With 63% public approval, the small city of Aubagne is starting to build two new light rail lines totaling 8.7 miles, just slightly longer than Los Angeles’ Crenshaw/LAX Line, but at about 1/10 the cost. Aubagne is rapidly growing city a few miles inland from the French Riviera coast, near Marseille. It has the headquarters and training base of the French Foreign Legion.

3 stations are planned, and two lines share a common east-west axis with service branching to 4 terminals. The light rail trains will operate on reserved rights-of-way. The line is a classic line between French and U.S. practice is that French light rail is given traffic priority and runs on the sur-
face, while U.S. systems tend to frequently be saddled with expensive overpasses and tunnels so that trains don’t get in the way of motorists.

Aubagne construction estimates foresee a cost of $33.5 million per mile, $161 million for Line 1 and $161 million for the shorter Line 2 add-on. The first line is scheduled to start operations on one section in 2014 and be completed in 2015. The second line schedule is completed 2016.

Long term, Aubagne’s light rail may even-
tually connect with the expanding light rail lines of Marseille. There is already SNCF-
operated commuter rail service to Marseille today and the new light rail service will connect it with the railroad station in Aubagne.

Rides will be free on the Aubagne light rail trains, as local buses have been since 2009. A free light rail system will be the first of its kind anywhere. Drake also reports on public concern about Aubagne being trou-
bled by congestion.

Aubagne is a well-to-do town that is influenced by the repeated success of light rail in two dozen cities and towns around France. France has been able to do this by effective cost control. Drake also reports on new lines in other cities, including Reims, Bordeaux, Brest, Montpellier, and Orleans.

Drake reports that French cities see light rail not as a solution to congestion, but a much preferred alternative to driving on con-
gested streets and highways. 83% of the public expects “easy access” within Aubagne with the new lines.

Once the rail lines open, and with the connection to the train station, many in Aubagne can then choose to live without a car if they so desire. There is substantial value in that freedom of choice.

Aubagne is likely to be the 29th French city or town to operate a train line when service starts in 2016 - up from just three surviving tram lines in the early 1980’s. It is the smallest by a factor of two, with a popu-
lation only 46,000.

Aubagne, along with rail manufacturer Alstom, is making an impressive effort to adapt light rail to smaller towns - such as was done in the U.S. and South L.A. in the 1990s. If successful, it opens the way for substantial expansions of light rail systems in many more areas.

Alstom says it designed the new cars with a view to “meeting the needs of medi-
ум-sized towns with between 50,000 and 100,000 inhabitants. Citadis Compact keeps a tight rein on lifecycle cost to provide a solution that quickly pays for itself through a combination of effective capacity, low energy consumption and impressive lifespan.” That’s the kind of forward thinking we could use in the U.S.

California’s newest light rail line to get funding is one linking the Expo Line and the Green Line to Los Angeles International Airport. The proposed Crenshaw/LAX light-

rail line was approved in a pair of May and June meetings, ending two decades of pub-
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by Richard F. Tolmach

A Bay Area high-speed rail expert and aerospace engineer has released a slashing critique of the California High Speed Rail Authority’s routing decisions between Bakersfield and Blythe involving the Southern Mountain Crossing, arguably the most technically challenging mileage of the California project.

The web-published piece and its supporting documents appear to represent hundreds of hours of research and analysis, but are readily readable and accessible, with all calculations out in the open, contrary to the style of the Authority’s work. Clem Tillier’s documentation absolutely demolishes the case for the Antelope Valley high-speed rail (HSR) route, along with the Authority’s claims regarding cost, distance, speed and elapsed travel time.

With two lawsuits focusing squarely on false claims by the Authority pending in California courts, the independent analysis poses both legal and technical problems for the project, especially because its findings are very strong, worded in common English, and readily supported.

Tillier takes aim at 12 myths about the southern mountain crossing which have been used to support the Tejon alignment, according to the Antelope Valley and Palmdale:

1. Tejon Pass HSR alignments can’t cross into Tejon Mountain Village property.
2. Tejon Pass HSR requires more tunneling than the Antelope Valley.
3. Palmdale.
4. Tejon Pass HSR costs are higher.
5. HSR can operate at 220 mph on long elevations.
6. Tejon Pass HSR is only 3-5 minutes faster than Antelope Valley HSR.
7. Tejon Pass HSR alignments can’t cross California courts, the independent analysis documentation absolutely demolishes the style of the Authority’s work. Clem Tillier’s aerospace engineer has released a slash-porting documents appear to represent hun-

7. Palmdale will never get fast rail service.
8. The Antelope Valley HSR corridor, currently lacking megawatts for Metrolink enhancements.
9. Antelope Valley HSR tunnels (37 miles total) will be more feasible, in addition to saving billions of dollars.
10. HSR supporters, those who are analytically involved, or buy out Tejon whose entire market capitalization is about $620 million, will stay away, and California’s high-speed rail system is unlikely to make the project viable in capital investment.

HSRA EXAGGERATED TEJON COSTS

On the other side, Tillier says HSRA exaggerated the cost of 4 to 6 miles the tunneling required for the Tejon/Palmdale alignment by use of obsolete engineering data that has since been refined in DEIR/AAAs documents.

HSRA assumed the Tejon grades and the viaducts through Bakersfield could be traversed at 220 mph, neither of which is a reasonableable premise for current engineering and equipment plans.

Finally, Tillier points out HSRA also neglected to gauge the financial impact of having to build and supply power to a high-voltage line for the Bakersfield-Mojave corridor, currently generated for 60 miles.

As part of his presentation, Tillier suggests Bakersfield not be sliced between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

In a self-effacing way, Tillier asks “how some guy on the internet can come up with all of these studies by professional consultant teams and hundreds of millions of dollars? The point is that when it comes to math and physics, the numbers don’t lie,” says Tillier, who holds physics and engineering degrees from Princeton and Stanford.

Tillier, who also hosts the California HSR Compatibility Blog, is a strong supporter of the Antelope Valley alignment. He suggests that HSR service will fall short of Palmdale’s, and fail to produce as much travel as Metrolink enhancements.

As part of his presentation, Tillier even takes on the notion that HSR would be so good that it would be in Palmdale, by pointing out a profit-driven HSR operator would limit Palmdale frequency during peak hours and increase prices to discourage low-yielding passengers. He suggests that HSR service will fall short of Palmdale’s, and fail to produce as much travel as Metrolink enhancements.

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Opinion by Gordon Osmundson

President Obama has become a big supporter of high-speed rail and with it another concept, “fast trains” defined as passenger trains running at speeds up to 110 mph. Although the Capitol Corridor will enjoy no benefits from the high-speed rail project, there is no good reason why Capitol Corridor passengers should have to wait for decades for train service that at least competes with auto speeds.

The Capitol Corridor appears to be an optimum testbed for fast trains, given its ample population. There is a lot of room for improvement, because current schedules average under 50 mph end to end. The 2013 California State Rail Plan lists, under “Other Long Term Improvements” for the Capitol Corridor a project to provide FRA Class VI track capable of 110 mph but provides no list of improvements to achieve this. Similarly, the Amtrak 20-Year Rail Improvement Plan Technical Report of March 2001, says that listed long-term capital improvements would cut travel times by 20 percent but near term projects would reduce times by only twenty minutes Sacramento to San Jose.

These speeds are not competitive with driving even if one ignores station access times. To achieve a respectable average under 50 mph end to end.

Cutting time from the schedule can come in two ways, increasing track speed or shortening the route. There are a number of segments of the line where the current alignment would allow speeds to be increased from the current maximum of 79 mph to 110 mph. Examples of this are Emeryville-North Richmond and Bahia-Martinez.

The biggest expense of this would be four-quadrant improvements to grade crossings, required to bring track up to FRA Class VI. However, it should be pointed out that increasing speeds from 79 to 110 mph only saves about 2-1/4 minutes every 10 miles. My guess is that increasing the maximum speed would only save about 15 minutes overall, important but far from the full answer.

This leaves two options, shortening the line and/or eliminating slow tracks. There are currently five segments where track speed is restricted by curves or other conditions. These are the two wyes on the Centerville Line, 15 mph; street trackage through Jack London Square, 25 mph; slow track through the West Oakland yards, 50 mph; five degree curves along San Pablo Bay and the Carquinez Straight, 40-50 mph; and speed restrictions over the Benicia Bridge, 40 mph.

Beyond these speed restrictions, the line also suffers considerable ciruclity. The line between San Jose and Oakland has a dog-leg detour via the Centerville Line. The Centerville line could be shortened by about two miles and one of the wyes eliminated by rerouting the line from Union City via the old Western Pacific right-of-way.

The winding line along San Pablo Bay and the Carquinez Straight could be straightened or portions of it bypassed by tunnels. Trackage through Jack London Square could be placed underground and the line shortened by running under the Nelson Mandela parkway where it would cross the BART line at the east end of the West Oakland BART station and with a BART-Capitol Corridor transfer station established there.

The Oakland-Sacramento line is far less direct than Highway 80, taking a dog-leg route via Point Pinos and Martinez. If these detours could be straightened or at least relieved, both travel time and operating cost could be reduced. In this article I will present a proposal to ease the dog leg route via Martinez.

I was looking at the map of Suisun Bay Crossing on page 70 of David Myrick’s Southern Pacific Water Lines and I noted that the old route followed by the ferry boats Contra Costa and Solano was about 3 miles shorter than the current route via Martinez and the Suisun Bay Bridge.

This got me to thinking. I remember hearing some talk somewhere that there should be a rail bridge high enough to get the Capitol Corridor over the straits without a lift span so that trains would not be delayed by ship traffic. I’ve puzzled over how a rail bridge could do this when the highway approaches have taken up all the possible alignments at this elevation at the current crossing. I also think that the current bridge, please correct me if I’m wrong, has never been seismically upgraded and should be if it is to be a major crossing for passenger trains. Track speed on the bridge and through Martinez is 40 mph or less.

But why does the crossing need to be there? The old route was shorter, could it be followed? An approach viaduct would be needed on the Benicia side, but could the hills on the Port Costa side be used to gain the necessary elevation? To find out, I downloaded the appropriate USGS map, clipped out the area from Crockett to the Suisun Bay Bridge and imported a jpeg of it into a CAD program. I then began to plot routes up some of the small valleys into the hills. It wasn’t hard to find three alternative alignments.

The basic problem is get up and over the Carquinez Straight on a bridge that provides the same clearances as the existing spans including the nearby highway bridges. The current railroad bridge has a lift span horizontal clearance of 291 feet and a vertical clearance of 70 feet (closed) and 135 feet (open). The Benicia-Martinez highway bridge has 138 feet of vertical clearance and, opposite the railroad’s lift span, a horizontal clearances of 528 feet.
All three routes begin at the western end with a junction with the existing line about midway between the C&H refinery and the Eakley fishing pier. The key to each of the routes is a one half mile long tunnel cut above the depth of the parking lot of the Bull Valley Staging area of the Carquinez Strait Regional Shoreline. The tunnel would follow a slightly different alignment in each alternative. The western portal would be in roughly the same location in each, but the east portal would be slightly different. In each case there would be a 2.0% grade from the junction with the existing line to the east portal where we come out in a small valley at an elevation of approximately 100 feet.

The new line would be all double track and at the junction, I figure that there would be a flyover for the new north track to link to the existing north track. The approach grade for the flyover might exceed 2%, but it would normally be used by westbound trains. An extensive cut would be needed in the side of the hill just east of the flyover and the line would pass just south of the lower regional park parking lot. Just above here the line would enter the tunnel which would come out in a little valley just above the town of Port Costa. There is no reason, from an engineering standpoint that a cut could not be made in place of the tunnel, but as this is regional park land, a tunnel seems more appropriate. A cut would be well over one hundred feet deep and would cut off the regional park from the Carquinez Scenic Drive.

Alternative #1 runs along the south facing slope of the hill to the west of Port Costa. It next spans over the town on an 1100 foot long viaduct. There is a short cut through the hillside south of Port Costa and then a 685 foot tunnel which comes out on the existing rail line. The grade from the east portal of the west tunnel to the span over the straits would be approximately 1% and the maximum curvature 1.6% degrees. The track elevations shown on the plan are above the existing top of rail of the existing line, which is several feet above zero elevation. I don’t have any information on just what the later figure is but am guessing that it is around five feet.

The Carquinez Straits would be spanned by a three-quarter mile long cable stay or suspension bridge. As I have drawn it, the center span of this bridge would be 2050 feet long. Another option would be a concrete viaduct somewhat like the recent 1-680 Benicia bridge. In any case the line and grade of the bridge approaches are such that the 138 feet of vertical clearance of the Benicia highway bridge can be comfortably achieved. From the end of this bridge to Army Point in Benicia there would be a combination viaduct and fill on a 2.0% grade. This route is the shortest, has the fewest and most gentle curves and highest potential speeds. I’m guessing 90+ mph but it is also probably the most expensive of the three alternatives, there could be some controversy over the plan to build a viaduct over the town of Port Costa and it would have the greatest impact on the regional park.

Alternative #2 uses the same Carquinez Span as Alt #1, and the same tunnels, but it passes to the south of Port Costa. It spans Bull Valley on a curved 600 foot Viaduct at a point west of the Alternate #1 viaduct. Its biggest drawback is that it requires a 4.5 degree curve in the existing line uses five degree curves) that would likely restrict speeds to somewhere around 50 mph. However if it were banked for passenger trains and not slow moving freight trains, higher speeds should be possible. This is the sharpest curve in any of the alternatives. There is also an additional cut in the hillside east of town.

The third alternative uses a different location for the Carquinez span. It crosses Bull Valley on a 500 foot span at about the same location as the viaduct in Alt #2. It then enters a quarter mile tunnel which comes out at the site of the old Port Costa brick works. The line next takes a 3.35 degree curve around the south side of a hill to Point Carquinez where a 6/10 of a mile cable stay or suspension bridge would span the straits. A 1.06 degree curve at the eastern end would link it to the same approach viaduct as in the other alternatives.

With this alternative the eastern tunnel is longer than the eastern tunnel in the other alternatives and the line is somewhat longer, but the span of the straits is shorter so it may cost about he same as Alternative #2.

With each alternative, a new Benicia depot would be built at the east end of the viaduct/fill at the site of the current suba manufacturing plant at Bayshore road and Jackson Street. Access from I-780 would be by E 5th Street to E H Street. A creek would then be bridged to connect E H St to Bayshore.

Part of the curve on the old line around Army Point, below the existing bridge, is two degrees, but it tightens up to follow the shore line. This curve could be kept to two degrees all the way around the point with a short fill in the bay or a low viaduct. A tangent from this curve would strike out across the east side of the auto storage parking areas in eastern Benicia. This tangent would cross tidal flats and join the existing line on a one degree curve at Lake Herman Road. This alignment would entirely bypass the industrial area in eastern Benicia and the switching operations which go on there. Some sort of access would need to be maintained, however, to the piers to the west of the current bridge.

I believe that this is a practical plan, which would shorten the route of the Capitol Corridor by some three miles. It would also bypass about 8 miles of line where speeds currently are only 40 to 50 mph. I would guess that some 5+ minutes could be cut from the schedule. The only drawback that I see is that Martinez would be dropped as a station, but Benicia would be gained.

I don’t know what a bridge of this type would cost to build, but the Carquinez highway span completed in 2003 cost $240 million and this would be about the same length exclusive of the eastern approach viaduct. The Carquinez Bridge did, however, include extensive elevated ramps on its southern end adding to its cost. The cost to construct the first Benicia–Martinez highway bridge in 1962 was $25 million, but the second 1.7 mile long highway bridge, built in 2007 cost $1.3 billion.

Gordon Osmundson has been involved in railway preservation having worked on projects with the Golden Gate Railroad Museum, the Pacific Locomotive Association and the Nevada Northern Railway Museum. He was committee chairman and editor of the PLA’s master plan for the Niles Canyon Railway. He is currently Treasurer of TRAC and is writing a book on the Nevada Northern.
Britain’s proposed High Speed 2 rail line from London to Birmingham saw serious opposition arise in late June, just as project backers announced a huge increase in costs four years before construction is to begin. Tory politicians are seeing support for the project begin by Tony Blair’s Labor government crumble. Transport secretary, Patrick McLoughlin, told the House of Commons that the cost of construction has risen nearly a quarter to $65 billion, and as much as $77 billion if rolling stock is included. A National Audit Office (NAO) report published in May, estimated that the first phase of the project faced a $5 billion funding gap.

The proposed line, with many controversial features in common with California’s high-speed project: 220 mph top speed, a highly unqualified staff, and heavy influence by consulting firms, was pitched as a public works project to boost the economy. Lord Peter Mandelson, the former business secretary, warned that the line could become a “demonstration project,” referring to hard-pressed northern cities which are still in recession. “It perversely represents the interests of people it was intended to help,” referring to high-speed project: 220 mph top speed, a highly unqualified staff, and heavy influence by consulting firms. Mandelson’s comment could prompt action by private rail operators, who may collectively outweigh the power of those construction interests like Balfour Beatty who support the project.

Mandelson said Labor’s backing for the project in 2010 was a “politically-driven” decision intended to “paint an upbeat view of the future” following the 2008 financial crash. He said he changed his opinion as his “understanding of the costs and benefits” changed.

Original cost estimates were “almost entirely speculative,” he admitted, “neither quantified nor proven.” Blair’s Labor government had assumed that the project would attract funding from financial markets rather than the burden falling on taxpayers, said Mandelson. HS2 is failing to leverage private investment.

Mandelson said economic benefits of HS2 were “neither quantified nor proven.” Earlier work projected the line would produce a $19.2 billion benefit by carrying existing business travelers at faster speeds. But the study made the flawed assumption that business travelers do no work on trains, no longer the case since trains have Wi-Fi.

Mandelson and others say it is time to consider smaller projects with quicker and more certain benefits, including upgrades to the east and west coast mainlines and regional and urban transportation.

British commentators turned to the writings of John Maynard Keynes for a relevant quote, “When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do?”

A committee which advises the Federal Government on safety practices proposes to adopt European standards on rail cars. The Federal Railroad Administration’s (FRA) Railroad Safety Advisory Committee (RSAC) voted unanimously to implement new crashworthiness performance standards for next generation U.S. high-speed rail equipment.

The standards, which FRA is developing now before they are published later this year in a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, will provide baseline safety requirements for equipment operating up to speeds of 220 mph on high-speed lines, while providing flexibility to operate on existing systems up to speeds of 125 mph. Once finalized through the FRA’s rulemaking process, the standards would be employed in regions designated for high-speed rail service.

“Today’s action by RSAC is a continuation of FRA’s move away from prescriptive regulations towards more performance-based regulatory environment,” said Joseph Szabo, FRA administrator. “[the standards] will better align our approach to passenger safety and the use of rail equipment with the rest of the world.”

The standards are an alternative to existing crashworthiness requirements that have influenced U.S. equipment for nearly a century. The standards would establish performance-based requirements, permitting the use of “service proven” designs.

Since 2009, members of RSAC have been reviewing existing requirements to identify a technology-neutral, performance-based approach using modern techniques, including crash energy management. Consensus on the standards was reached by the RSAC Engineering Task Force, made up of domestic and international railcar suppliers, including 12 railcar manufacturers.

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