by Richard F. Tolmach

Three months after his arrival as new CEO of the High Speed Rail Authority, Roelof van Ark exemplifies the distance between the promise and the reality of the multi-billion dollar project. The public still doesn’t know whether his arrival means reform, or a new lease on life for contract improprieties identified by the Legislative Analyst and the state Auditor General.

Van Ark’s industry experience at Siemens and Alstom gave rail advocates hope that he could restore confidence in the project.

However, van Ark, an equipment specialist whose background is not in modeling, questioned the competence of the University of California at Berkeley Institute of Transportation Studies, and attacked the ITS study for saying “the forecasts of high speed rail demand – and hence the profitability of the proposed high speed rail system – have very large error bounds. These bounds may be large enough to include the possibility that the California HSR may incur significant revenue shortfalls.”

Van Ark told ITS, “This is an extraordinary statement for which we find no foundation in the Draft Report.” In fact, the draft report makes a convincing case that the Cambridge Systematics model used by HSRA is entirely unreliable, and cannot be safely used to make policy decisions. The majority of industry voices agree with ITS. The ridership dispute has hardly helped restore confidence in the project.

It had been assumed that because van Ark came from industry, he would see the value of trying to align the project with current industry practice. Successful HSR projects depend upon involving operators and banks early in their design phase, to avoid waste of billions of dollars in engineering for routes no bank would fund.

Passage of $9 billion of California rail bonds in 2008 boosted interest by private firms, but the main obstacle has been trying to interest private capital in the mish-mash of risky, poorly planned segments that don’t add up to an operable network. Van Ark has expressed interest in the concept of public-private partnerships, but so far has not made any visible steps to attract private partners, so the project still faces a shortfall of over $30 billion in required funding. Serious fiscal crises at both state and federal levels rule out government as a source of the missing amount.

(continued on Page Two)
Van Ark: Waiting for Reform

(continued from Page One)

Meanwhile, the drift away from early buildable projects has raised concerns both at the Legislature and at the USDOT. The recent HSRA decision to announce that it is planning to spend all its current Federal ARRA allocation on “finishing the design and environmental clearance” is a very worrying signal.

This risks a $3.35 billion expenditure without any built product to show for the money, and would confirm federal and state funders’ worst fears about the California project. Critics of the Authority have been vindicated in their view that the projects put forward for study lack real world implementation potential.

As of Labor Day, the question remains whether van Ark can become an effective reformer.

The HSRA board’s September 2 decision to ignore Peninsula criticism and attack the well-connected neighbors of Gubernatorial candidate Meg Whitman seriously eroded the chances that a key segment of the line can be build without a set of legal headaches which make it too risky for a private partner to invest.

100 days after van Ark’s arrival, HSRA still has no real plan to build even a mile of track, and the railroad is dangerously understaffed. Projects are disappointed on all fronts with the high speed rail planning process. There have been a number of efforts to rein in the runaway money train with budget language, but the Governor and Legislature remain badly distracted by budget woes.

Van Ark has told legislators he lacks sufficient staff to be able to manage the nearly half-billion dollars in current contracts, let alone the several billion in new contracts the Authority is seeking. The understaffed HSRA team has also claimed to have trouble analyzing the products of Parsons Brinckerhoff and its subcontractors, and California’s delayed budget has exacerbated their problems.

On September 2, van Ark announced that most of the large contractors on his team are working without reimbursement at the risk of not getting paid. The smaller subs have stopped working altogether. This further rattles prospective private partners whose cash flows would be drastically uncertain under current conditions.

Another problem is that the Board now seems to be split into at least two factions, who are in full battle mode. For example, the recent board meeting was the scene of a 90 minute discussion concerning board conflicts of interest, spurred by a Legislative Counsel opinion.

The exchanges between Quentin Kopp and others were testy, almost heated, and resulted in several seconds to proposed motions being hastily withdrawn. Action was eventually taken to form a subcommittee to study the conflicts of interest. It contains board members Lynn Schenk, David Crane and Kopp.

Targets of the activity were Chair Curt Pringle and Vice-Chair Richard Katz, in reaction to their dual positions with local agencies and the board. If, as now appears possible, the majority of the board is able to oust the very Southern California members who were putting pressure on contractors to perform, all bets of a workable HSRA project are off.

Reformers say a true public-private partnership is the only way the California line can attract the $30 billion of private capital needed to start construction. More spending on plans without involving rail operators (the likeliest investors) risks a project that runs out of planning money without a single mile of line being built.

Van Ark cannot be successful if he cannot attract early partners because of unresolved risk management problems. The best way to fix this is an early decision to end spending for speculative design and get franchise bids from the potential builders and operators who can showcase more efficient ways to finance and build the line, reducing overall risk.

Van Ark has not had much time to effect changes urgently needed and many remain honestly skeptical. Based on his solid background and extensive resume, he still has the capability of delivering on his promise, establishing a true FFP, and building a world class railroad.
A Safer Car: Metrolink Considers CEM Option

By Numan Parada

Metrolink’s new and highly safety-conscious CEO John E. Fenton presented a dilemma to the Metrolink Board during its Friday, August 27 meeting. What if Metrolink had the cash to exercise its 20-car Rotem option and eventually was able to replace its current entire fleet of aging Bombardier commuter cars? Fenton was doing a follow-up on the presentation he first made in July on what taking the option to buy additional Crash Energy Management (CEM) cars entailed and what Metrolink would have to do in order to get the new cars.

Fenton told of concerns by the CEO’s of agencies that comprise the Southern California Regional Rail Authority regarding funding his proposed acquisition of a safer fleet. Agencies such as LA County Metropolitan Transportation Authority and Orange County Transportation Authority might be able to fund the cars, but there has to be leadership and political will.

Sufficient funds remain a challenge. Fenton has made a strong case for the purchase in cost avoidance, fleet age reduction, rider safety and upgraded amenities.

By contrast, overhauling and retrofitting the 18 existing second-generation Bombardier cars would cost a total of $21.6 million. Doing the same for the 25 third-generation cars Metrolink has would cost $30 million. Even with the retrofit, the cars would lack vacuum toilets, composite floors and CEM crush zones.

However, by purchasing just 20 cars before October, Metrolink avoids paying the $21.6 million to retrofit its second-generation cars and the additional $11 million to exercise the option after October. Because of this, Metrolink would book a $36-million asset at $14.4 million.

This would also allow Rotem to deliver the new 20 cars by November 2011. By then, only the 23 third-generation Bombardier cars would remain. This would reduce the average age of the coach fleet from 3.44 years to 2 years and increase the number of CEM cars in the fleet from 73% to 86%.

Fenton believes Metrolink may be able to purchase the last 23 Rotem cars at the post-October option price of $2.35 million each; this totals $54 million if the option is exercised before October 2010. If the option is instead exercised after October, the purchase price increases to $2.35 million per car for a total of $47 million.

Per Fenton’s presentation, 76% of the existing coach car fleet is at least halfway through its life cycle of 30 years, if not older. 84% of the passenger car fleet is past the mid-life overhaul recommendation of 1 million miles per car.

Metrolink has a contract with Hyundai Rotem to build 117 new CEM vehicles with the intent of replacing most of the commuter fleet. The first of the new cars arrived at Metrolink earlier this year and are currently undergoing tests. Metrolink anticipates receiving the rest of the order by September 2011.

However, the contract came with an option to purchase 20 additional Rotem coach cars at $1.8 million each; this totals $36 million if the option is exercised before October 2010. The post-October option price for the last 20 cars is $2.35 million per car, or $47 million total.

The new fleet would have a life expectancy of 30 to 40 years, allow for a standardized fleet that uses CEM technology, improved passenger amenities, and features a two-year warranty, which would initially reduce operating costs.

The biggest challenge to upgrading and making the Southern California fleet safer is simply political will.

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1025 Ninth Street #223
Sacramento, CA 95814-3516
Telephone: 916-557-1367
e-mail: trac@omssoft.com
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Tony Danials, High Speed Rail project manager for Parsons Brinckerhoff has relinquished his California job to focus on other US HSR projects, notably the Tampa-Orlando project in Florida. Metrolink Dispatching delays Surliner 567 by a half-hour on a regular basis, according to Chris Guenzler of trainweb.org who has put up a detailed illustrated post on the site. http://www.trainweb.org/chrism/delay.html. IT LOOKS LIKE A CARBON COPY of the problems facing Train 799 between Chatsworth and Simi Valley over most of the past six years. The Metrolink, Caltrans nor Amtrak can seem to resolve train conflicts on single-track Metrolink territory. San Joaquin Trails may get more equipment, following attempts by Caltrans Div. of Rail to rectify the uneven division of the northern California fleet of cars between the capitals and the San Joaquins. Average revenue per car in the Capitol fleet is less than half that obtained on the San Joaquin fleet. The California Public Utilities Commission unanimously approved a design for a rail crossing and a new station for the Expo Line at Farmdale. The Avenues All-Ages at Farmdale on Thursday, July 29. The decision concludes months of contentious fighting between the Expo Metro Line Constructors and various local groups, which debated how safe an at-level crossing would be for students at Dorsey High School. The last 25 Rotem cars of the proposed high speed rail car in collaboration with states, but unfortunately, it seems to be designed with a top speed of 125 mph in mind. The car seems optimized for existing vendors and components currently in the latest bleeve California equipment. Compatibility of Metrolink, Caltrans and Amtrak Corridor equipment with true high-speed rail is a problem, and will complicate the design of all new platforms. Statewide. That has been no meeting of the minds on specifications, something that concerns many of those involved in advancing the commuter rail and high-speed rail expansion projects. A Vote of the HSRA Board on September 2 certified the environmental document on the Bay Area-Central Valley line construction and guaranteed another round of lawsuits by cities. Palo Alto and several new cities are considering joining previous litigants because the HSRA chose elevated viaducts in place of the tunnels or open cuts cities asked for. Sacramento’s Rail Yard faces final life-saving blow from federal court in New York to have spent portions of the loan on other properties. There are concerns that the project may fall apart...
Opinion by Richard F. Tolmach

Ridership claims of the California High Speed Rail Authority (HSRA) have strained the credibility of transportation industry observers for the past decade. However, until early this year, the public was unaware of the substantial problem. The data, because supporting detail was largely hidden in confusing presentations, was the subject of technical analyses. Jeff Boster of HSRA, however, said in his transmittal e-mail that “…this material as presented did not previously exist and significantly impacted legislative staff thinking into preparing it.” Until CARRD received the material, no member of the public or any oversight agency had seen the technical underpinnings of the final ridership model. Without peer-reviewed documentation that a model accurately replicates current travel behavior, it is useless as a predictor of future travel. Doug Kinsey, the MTC’s modeling director, was quoted February 7 in the Palo Alto Daily News commenting that there were unequivocal changes to the model. “My understanding is that the modifications were minor enough they didn’t need to be peer reviewed,” MTC modeling director to the evaluation tool doesn’t necessarily have to be peer-reviewed.

Do is 600 percent change minor? One notable change made commute and business travel in San Francisco much longer, with Merced, Bakersfield, Palmdale and Anaheim ridership increases of 895 percent, compared to 600 percent higher than the value reported to the peer review panel. The intramodal revision used an extra 30 minutes between departures would cut traffic by the same factor as 5 extra minutes travel time, a typical figure. The revised model used 30 minutes. The resulting model made frequency as important as travel time.

This change appeared designed to tip the scales toward rail, which has speed advantages due to route detours added since 2005 but plenty of frequency. There are 99 total San Francisco–Los Angeles trains each direction. The 6 achieve HSRA’s claimed 2 hour 40 minute travel time. 74 trains stop five or more times and take an average of 2 hours 13 minutes. Only by tweaking frequency sensitivity did these trains become air-competitive.

The size of the frequency sensitivity change enabled the obvious travel advantages of air travel in distant markets such as Orange County and San Diego, and counteracted penalties for rail detours or transfers. The traffic increases at Anaheim, Merced, Gilroy and San Francisco seen on the chart at left appear to be one minute.

The disclosure also explained how Altamont’s population and travel time advantages over the Pacheco Route were negated. Tweaked frequency sensitivity could explain why the model showed circ-umstances–Chico-Churchill San Francisco runs produced more revenue than direct Altamont trains.

The 6-times change is not a minor distortion, and would undoubtedly have caused the peer review panel to reject the model. Proper coefficients are calculations with substantiating data. The new frequency coefficient lacks any supporting evidence, documentation, or even informal explanation. This lack of documentation makes it extremely difficult to determine how the changes are any sort of honest correction.

“Sledgehammer” Adjustment Signals Unsustainable Results

There are additional clear signs that the revised model is fatally flawed. Constants specific to air, but not rail, have been added. Some rail results are too large and show other parameters. This is a de facto admission that the model cannot appropriately capture passenger choice based on objective factors such as travel time and costs, so as one economist commented, “a sledgehammer is being used to bang them into place.”

For travel demand specialists, use of large-scale changes in constant and enforcement of travel time, because by their very nature they suggest bias and tampering. Models are supposed to work without big modal constants.

Because the peer review committee was kept in the dark and MTC published preliminary coefficients and constants which looked relatively reasonable, the gaming of the model workings was concealed from all. The true authors of the model are an open question, but it appears that Cambridge Systematics wanted to distance itself from all work that has happened since April. July 17, 2009, MTC’s transmittal states that “There have been no changes to those panel members of the Caltrans RPA since the last peer review.” This raises more questions about authorship of the August 2007 revisions that lowered Altamont’s traffic but increased Pacheco’s, as well.

Who is responsible for any revisions since April 2007 is still a matter of controversy. What is not controversial is the traditional method of public transport which wastes equipment and prevents logical reform of the Surrailiner trains, just to benefit passengers on a 40 mile point to point run.

Conclusions

Transportation modeling consultant, Norman Marshall ofSmart Mobility based in Norwich, Vermont made the following finding. “I conclude that the Surrailiner Project’s assumptions about ridership are unacceptable biases into the model, and that the model as presented in the January 2007 report is invalid for forecasting future HSRA ridership and revenue.”

The University of California at Berkeley’s nationally-recognized Institute for Transportation Studies subsequently made the finding that the model was “unsuitable for policy analysis.”

Now that HSRA has disclosed its use of this model, and chosen to accept its work, there are the following significant implications:

1. Applications for Federal ARRA funding were based on HSRA ridership estimates.
2. Each Project and Program Level ERP which relied upon findings of the model calls for facilities which don’t exist. It suggests that over optimistic ridership augmentation are significant, quite similar, as the requirement for a train hourly San Francisco Transbay Terminal and Los Angeles Union Station capacity, and quadruple tracking of San Francisco-San Jose and Los Angeles-Anahiem segments requiring use of eminent domain.
3. Claims that the HSRA project will not require public subsidy are no longer credible.
4. Without valid ridership and fiscal projections, the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on engineer- ing and ERP studies have been wasted.

Reform of the northern end of the Pacific Surfliner service has certainly been needed for years. Every schedule change to date starting in November 2004, the Los Angeles-San Luis Obispo round trip has had among the lightest loads of any California trains, losing an estimated $40 million while carrying about 600,000 Amtrak passengers, for a service that produces no revenue and needs to be redone from scratch.

The Surrailiner trains, at least, are services that could run to avoid making travelers worse off, but increasing ridership and produce about 40 percent more traffic and about 80 percent more revenue than those that terminate in Los Angeles.

Passengers in San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego County could turn the Surfliner, a service which has among the lightest traffic of any service in the state, into a service that doesn’t harm the service offer in other cities.

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After it leaves Santa Barbara going north, Train 799 typically has less than a bus load of passengers aboard. Revenue-cost ratio has hovered around 21 percent, compared to about 75 percent for other Surfliners.

Another way of thinking about 798 and 799 is that the single Los Angeles-San Luis Obispo round trip is less than a bus load of passengers aboard the three Santa Barbara-San Diego round trips which have in the same period carried about 4,000,000 passengers.

Last month, Santa Barbara County which is trying to address daily traffic jams inbound from Ventura County each morning and outbound in the evening, asked Caltrans to adapt its schedules for 798 and 799 to make the train more useful to commuters. This involves a 5:00 am departure from Los Angeles to provide an 8:00 am Santa Barbara arrival. Because passing has been able to improve the trains’ poor performance so far, it is hard for Caltrains to turn down the offer, especially since it comes with the promise of increased Santa Barbara County revenues to make up any shortfall in revenue from the proposed change with its own funding.

High-speed rail is not intended to make sense to take the train, because it would lock Caltrains into permanent, difficult and costly services which wastes equipment and prevents logical reform of the Surfliner trains, just to benefit passengers on a 40 mile point to point run.

Caltrains should not destroy the remaining util- ity in the northbound service by having it leave Los Angeles at 5:00am or earlier, and return to Los Angeles an hour after, making service just about unuseable in both directions. This, plus running such infrequent trains, is invalid for forecasting future HSRA ridership and revenue.

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### BUILD THE VALLEY LINE FIRST

Since the passage of Proposition 1-A in November 2008 and the commitment of the Federal Government to provide $2.25 billion of funding to the High-Speed Rail (HSR) project in California, planning has taken on a new urgency and HSR may become a reality in California.

I say “may” because the way it is now proposed, the California High-Speed Rail Authority (HSRA) may burn through the $9 billion in Proposition 1A funds before we see the benefits of high-speed rail and how well it can perform.

When completed the system will run from San Francisco and Sacramento to Los Angeles/Anaheim and San Diego, but the proposal is to build it in phases.

Phase One is comprised of three isolated segments, (1) Los Angeles to Anaheim, (2) San Francisco to San Jose and (3) Bakersfield to Merced.

Today’s cost for 30 miles from LA to Anaheim is estimated (HSR December 2009 data) at $4.6 billion ($154 million a mile). The 50 miles from SF to San Jose is $3.3 billion ($106 million a mile). Current estimated total cost for these two short segments is $9.9 billion.

The total project cost by completion will probably exceed $40 billion. In addition to $9 billion in bond money, plus local grants and Federal funding the HSRA Authority hopes for private partnerships to defray $10-12 billion of costs. And the hitch: The way the system is proposed to be built may not happen and this is where the San Joaquin Valley cities may have an interest.

Attracting private money requires a potential future return. Building segments (1) and (2) first which would cut about 20 minutes from the present rail time between LA and Anaheim and 30 minutes between SF and San Jose, I doubt a future return is possible. If all or most of the $9 billion of bond money is spent and the project lacks private interest, HSR could remain in limbo. We presently have decent rail service between LA and Anaheim and SF and San Jose.

And yet the HSRA is preparing for just such a scenario. In its November 20, 2008 Business Plan, the Authority states “that segmental funding may not be available to the Los Angeles Basin and the Bay Area would be built first, and if further funding were not to materialize, California would be left with improved commuter rail service in those areas.” Almost $9 billion for what? As I said we already have decent commuter rail service in these areas.

What does seem to make sense is completing Segment 3 first, the 175 miles between Bakersfield and Merced priced at $6.8 billion or $33 million per mile for this so-called test track. A longer distance at a much less per mile cost than the others. Even better is to extend the track another 114 miles to Sacramento at an additional cost (based on mileage) of $4.4 billion or less than the cost to build the 50 miles between SF and San Jose or the 30 miles between LA and Anaheim. The $9 billion in state bond money plus the $2.25 billion of Federal funding would come close to building this entire stretch with very little additional funding needed. It makes sense for the following reasons:

- The largest travel market in California (HSR Final Business Plan, June 2000) is within, and between the San Joaquin Valley and major State cities, including SF and Sacramento and accounts for 44% of statewide travel. With Segment 3 extended to Sacramento and this potential you have a viable way of showcasing HSR which is critical. With this potential it could generate the outside investment needed to complete the system. At speeds near 200 MPH you cut the running time from Bakersfield to Sacramento to about 2 hours from 5 ½ and the Bay Area to about 3 ½ hours from six, by using existing track from Stockton until a HSR connection is built. Get this segment built and the rest will come very quickly because HSR is that good!

- This is a great project for California and if we allow politics to prevail over common sense then we, the people are the losers. I believe Bakersfield to Sacramento should have priority.

Walter Strakosch
Mill Valley, CA

### BUILD LA-BAKERSFIELD FIRST

I strongly advocate building the Los Angeles to Bakersfield segment of the HSR system first. This segment can be designed to be used to connect the existing conventional rail lines from Los Angeles to San Diego and from Bakersfield to Sacramento and Oakland. By making this the “incremental” first stage of development in an area of useful outcomes from HSR incremental the Authority can overcome some of the resistance to committing the whole $40 billion plus before the citizens see results. This investment would be a wonderful way to demonstrate not only the HSR future, but also the value of a supporting network of conventional services.

This first segment could be operated two ways:

- As a “pure” line with HSR equipment, with passengers transferring to conventional trains at Bakersfield and Los Angeles

- As an “incremental through train” line, with single-seat rides from San Diego to San Bernardino, and Riverside through Los Angeles and Bakersfield to Fresno, Stockton, Sacramento and Oakland.

Although the “incremental” trains would not be as fast as the “pure HSR” trains, the travel time and convenience of the single-seat service maybe more attractive.

Listed below are some practical technical planning and design issues to be addressed in order to implement the “incremental” through train concept:

- The locomotives on the conventional lines would of course, have to be exchanged for electric locomotives at Bakersfield and Los Angeles, an operating practice that is done throughout the world as railways incrementally advance the areas of electric propulsion.

- The passenger cars now used on the San Joaquin and Surfliner services (double deck) may be too tall for the clearance envelope for HSR therefore a fleet of new single-level cars would be needed. This new fleet of (locomotive hauled) cars should be certified for 125 MPH speed and capable of operating on both the HSR and conventional networks.

- As both Los Angeles and Bakersfield have low level platforms now and the conventional trains operate with low platforms on their routes, the HSR stations at Palmadale and Burbank could have temporary low platforms pending completion of the whole HSR line.

- Operating speeds on the “incremental” HSR line from Los Angeles to Bakersfield would be constrained by the type of locomotives and cars to perhaps 150 MPH. In order to operate at up to 200 MPH in the future, the superlevitation in some curves would have to be changed; this is not a severe problem. In some mountainous terrain where HSR trains would be limited to approximately 150 MPH there would probably be no need to adjust the superlevitation because the different speeds would be accommodated by adjustments in the “unbalanced vibration” permitted under regulations and design criteria.

I am a registered California Professional Civil Engineer with a 40+ year career in rail transportation. Throughout this life of engineering practice I have

(continued on Page Seven)
GRADE SEPARATE ALL RAIL LINES IN SHARED CORRIDORS

The original concept of accommodating HSR on existing railroad corridors was to “do no harm”. If a HSR line is built on (or closely adjacent to) an existing railroad line as an elevated viaduct, the viaduct structure columns block the path needed for detour tracks to build future grade separations. This conforms the existing railroad and the surrounding community to suffering the safety, security, noise, and traffic impacts of the at-grade crossings for the rest of time.

California has experienced many devastating public grade crossing impacts; it simply has to be the standard of care for future public transportation investment to never hastily build future problems of this nature.

One of the long-term goals of railroads (whether owned by public agencies or the investors of Union Pacific or BNSF) is to eventually eliminate all at-grade public crossings. Due to financial constraints this goal is being pursued incrementally but over the decades many grade separation projects have been completed. Building the HSR line in a configuration that prevents further progress toward grade crossing elimination is to do public harm.

The reasons for grade separating only the HSR track cited in CAHSRA environmental documents is that the construction of grade separations has impacts to the adjoining communities. There are two major approaches to an objection:

1. The HSR project could raise or lower all tracks in the corridor and leave the existing streets at grade and largely unaffected if the railroad has been rerouted to all locations due to track grade constraints, existing overpass or underpass structures, or existing drainage channels.

2. The HSR project should design grade separations with a high priority on reducing impacts to the community, even at the cost of expensive construction methods. The HSR project could raise or lower all tracks in the corridor and leave the existing streets at grade and largely unaffected if the railroad has been rerouted to all locations due to track grade constraints, existing overpass or underpass structures, or existing drainage channels.

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According to Christina Watson, the Project Manager, TAMC has secured about 20% of the required $110,000,000 capital for the project. More importantly, it has all but five percent of funds needed to get through the 2012 ROW Acquisition phase and through 2013 short term. In May the California Transportation Commission (CTC) approved a schedule update for $4.26 million in Traffic Congestion Relief Program funds, programmed to Monterey Rail for engineering and design, extending the expenditure deadline to the end of 2011. This followed the CTC approving $6.25 million in Proposition 116 Rail Bond Program funds, programmed to Monterey Rail for engineering and design, extending the expenditure deadline to the end of 2011. This followed the CTC approving $6.25 million in Proposition 116 Rail Bond Program funds, programmed to Monterey Rail for engineering and design, extending the expenditure deadline to the end of 2011.

By Robert Reynolds

In this era of budget disasters with signs of everything being cut back, it comes as a pleasant surprise to hear about a county still planning to implement a dedicated passenger rail service. That is happening in Monterey County now as the Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) is the local lead, grantee and owner of a project to extend commuter services to Salinas, which is called Monterey Rail.

Debbie Hale, Executive Director for the Transportation Agency addressed the Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority’s board of Directors meeting regarding the status of their plans to bring commuter rail to Salinas. TAMC is coordinating with the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) since up to 90% of projected ridership involves the Santa Clara Valley. Hale noted that “we would be very excited to have the Capitol Corridor as an operator for this service. They are an experienced operator with a strong financial reputation and an excellent relationship with the Union Pacific.” The proposed service to Salinas would be similar to the current successful service to FBC County.

The plans envision a 2013 service start with TAMC beginning construction this year to have a record of decision on the final Environmental Assessment by September 2010. The project schedule is: 2010—Complete federal environmental review, finalize negotiations for operations and submit Small Starts application; 2011–Complete design and engineering; 2012—Complete right-of-way acquisition; and 2013–Complete construction and Begin service.

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What is involved? The project includes construction of a train layover facility in Salinas and an intermodal hub there with adequate passenger parking. TAMC will design and build two new platforms and acquire lots for stops in Castroville and Pajaro. An initial schedule of 90 minutes is projected between Salinas and Diridon (68 miles). Current Caltrain service to Gilroy (30 miles) is 50 minutes.

Monterey Rail will require an agreement with UP for use of the additional 38 miles of their right-of-way. This would extend the Northern California Capitals network south from San Jose through Gilroy to Salinas.

Recently Capitol Corridor Manager Director David Kutrosky listened intently during the TAMC briefing and highlighted current discussions among interested parties. The impetus for initiating negotiations to operate Capital Corridor trains as an extension of the TAMC project’s mission is to electrify the corridor between San Jose and San Francisco, necessitating a transfer at San Jose to diesel service operating south from San Jose to Gilroy.

The most recent Capital Corridor Business Plan Update identified the extension as a possible service expansion. Monterey County does not currently serve on the CCPFCA Bus Service from Gilroy if Capitol Corridor Intercity Passenger Rail trains were extended to Salinas.

“This proposed extension provides an excellent opportunity to showcase the public Capital Corridor service and to pair service to and from the Monterey area. “ CCJPA Managing Director David Kutrosky said. “Experience shows that extending Capital Corridor train service is a team effort. TAMC is the lead for this project, and we are happy to be its rail resource. The CCPFCA will continue to work with TAMC, UPRR, Caltrain and VTA to identify an appropriate operating plan, a feasible capital improvement program and a reliable source of construction and operating funds.”

The latest news from Caltrain is that they’re proposing to build their existing service to Gilroy over the UP right-of-way to save $700,000 in an austere budget between now and 2012. By comparison, the TAMC proposal projects a net $1,200,000 annual operating expense. How does the ridership projection of about 2,350 boardings support such a cost if Caltrain can’t make a go of the Gilroy trains? Executive Director Hale notes that “we believe that the proposed extension of Capital Corridor service to Salinas will be very cost effective, and can also be win a riders to Gilroy whose service has been threatened now and in the past due to Caltrain budget woes.”

The Capital Corridor apparently has required trains and crews for the initial proposed four trains a weekday (two northbound in the AM commute and two southbound in the afternoon). This service model worked so well for Caltrain in the start up ACE. In spite of economic difficulties, commuter rail offers key advantages in the struggle to give drivers a choice for getting off the congested US Route 101.

Monterey Rail coincidentally stretches Bay Area rail service to within 130 miles of the north end of the Surfliner Corridor. Could this serve as a building block for the long hoped for daytime train “The Coast Daylight”? Monterey County extends south to about 40 miles from San Luis Obispo, the northern terminus of the Surfliner Corridor.

As has been discussed in the last California Rail News, adding end-to-end services can rapidly build traffic because of the dramatic increase in the number of city pairs served. It is also feasible that the former Southern Pacific line to Santa Cruz and the Monterey Peninsula Fixed Guideway Service could connect at Castroville. The Monterey Light Rail Line will carry passengers into the City of Monterey. These two connections boost ridership projections because of approximately 15 miles closer to the two counties on Monterey Bay. At any rate, the TAMC will be a key partner in any passenger rail renaissance in that part of the state.
Please join TRAC and the California Rail Foundation for our annual California Rail 2020 conference Nov. 12th and 13th in Sacramento. This year’s agenda will include:

**FRIDAY, November 12:** 6:30 PM-onward: No-host bar. Meet and greet at the 4th Street Grill, 400 L Street. Come and get to know your fellow TRAC members.

**SATURDAY, November 13:** 9:00 AM (registration), Meeting 10:00 AM to 5:30 PM with the following sessions at the Capitol Plaza Meeting Rooms, 3rd Floor, 1025 9th St:

- **Northern California Corridor Progress** - Speakers from ACE, SMART, and the Capitol Corridor talk about plans for upcoming capital improvements and service upgrades along their lines.

- **Metrolink Reinvents Itself** - John Fenton, Metrolink’s savvy new CEO, talks about the progress he has made since his arrival in May, and restructuring plans for next year that could radically improve connections.

- **The Emerging Market for High-Speed** - Representatives from high-speed rail technology companies and at least one Board Member from HSRA are expected to speak on high-speed plans and progress of ARRA grants.

**Saturday Conference Rates (includes continental breakfast and luncheon):** Day-of-event rates for members will be $100, but you can save significantly by being an early bird! (Non-members pay a $25 surcharge and get TRAC membership at a promotional rate). Make your checks out to Train Riders Association of California.

Saturday 6:30 PM No-host dinner at Rio City Cafe, right on the Sacramento River in Old Town, about 8 blocks due west up K Street Mall from the conference. Last Capitol Corridor train leaves for Oakland at 9:10 pm

**SUNDAY, November 14:** 9:00 AM–4:00 PM We have a special trip to the Alstom plant on Vallejo’s Mare Island, where California Cars are being refurbished, followed by a late lunch at La Cabana in Suisun. Register early: $69 including bus access and lunch. Bay attendees can head back by train from Suisun.

**Lodging:** TRAC has a special rate of $70/night at the Vagabond Inn Executive Old Town across the street from Amtrak at 909 3rd Steet. (916)446-1481. ID is: TRAC@VAGABOND, code is 244781 good for Friday or Saturday night. To reserve, call and mention the TRAC conference rate. Note direct link at trainriders.org

Conference is at 1025 Ninth Street, upstairs from TRAC!