It doesn’t help that Sacramento Regional Transit light rail trains have been made into housing of last resort for the homeless. The County skims off a big slice of each General Assistance check and hands it to Regional Transit, ostensibly for access to jobs for GA recipients. RT takes the funds whether or not the person in question has any use for transit service. So trains are now occupied by those seeking not transportation, but basic heat and shelter. Light rail stations have also suffered from this destructive program.

Now, compounding the City’s bad urban planning and worse aid policies, City of Sacramento officials have done back-room negotiations to plan moves of train platforms away from property holdings of favorite developers, at city expense, turning public transportation investment into a mockery. Sacramento is at risk of having several rail stations relocated to benefit developers.

In cities where transit and trains make a difference, stations are prime locations for development. Emeryville’s Amtrak station and Mountain View’s Caltrain station are now the hubs of two of the Bay Area’s most successful transit-oriented developments. San Francisco’s classy palm-lined Muni Metro stations on the Embarcadero made possible much of the South of Market boom, including the Giants stadium, where crowds stream off the trains at game time. Inner neighborhoods of San Diego have blossomed as rail-based walkable development made the city even more attractive to convention goers, who use the red trolleys and quarter-hourly airport bus links to avoid traffic.

Unfortunately, not every California city grasps the benefit of rail-based development. Finy poor Sacramento, where city politicians talk up smart growth, but make dumber development mistakes each succeeding year. The most damaging land decisions involve the city’s siting of stations and rail lines. For a variety of reasons, leading Sacramento developers have come to see rail stations as antithetical to their interests.

(continued on Centerfold)
WILLIAM F. MCGEEHAN, III
Contra Costa County
PRESIDENT
Bill grew up in Hazel
town, Pennsylvania and
studied at the John
Miller School For Arts
and Sciences. He then
moved to Kansas City.
He moved to California
in his early twenties,
working in the fields of
disabled adaptive-
technology and design, in
the transportation industry, for almost twenty years.
Bill believes the passenger rail system is going to see
some of the best innovations and changes over the
next several years, with progress and push from the
train riding community, leading many other forms of
transit across.
Bill recently had the opportunity to work closely
with the design team at Amtrak on new sleeper car
bathrooms. He was able to point out problems and
positives with the design that will hopefully help
passengers with mobility issues once the trains stand
up on the rails. Bill has logged about 370,000 miles so
far by Amtrak and can’t wait until he hits the half-
way point this fall.
His ancestors and relatives
in the transportation industry, for almost twenty years.
Bill believes the passenger rail system is going to see
some of the best innovations and changes over the
next several years, with progress and push from the
train riding community, leading many other forms of
transportation.

RICH MCLAUGHLIN
San Diego County
VICE-PRESIDENT
Rich Mclaughlin is a native of
IL. Rich grew up in
Southern California until
working at Amtrak trains
along Southern Pacific's Coast
Line. Graduating from San
Jose State University in 1985
with a degree in Aero Engi-
neering, he spent 22
years as a Naval Aviator. Since retiring from
the Navy he’s been employed by a Defense Contractor in San
Diego, currently as Director of Strategic Ac-
tivities. Rich has been interested in rail transportation
my entire life and use California and long distance trains
at every opportunity.
Several years ago I joined TRAC in attempt to
become more involved in the future of our rail systems. It
is extremely important at this juncture that we maintain
our route system and work towards improved service to
give it the attention it deserves.

BOB REYNOLDS
Sacramento County
SECRETARY
Bob Reynolds is a second-
generation Californian.
Bob grew up next to the
tracks. Some of his favorite
times have worked on American
Iron Cross since the mid-
hundred, some getting killed
during the notorious early
days. He has traveled on
the rails in Europe and
Asia and has visited many
of the US’s steam excursion operations over the last
twenty years. He travels on the west coast’s com-
mmercial rail networks frequently. He started volunteering
at TRAC after 2003’s RAIL 20 conference with an
interest in California’s evolving rail passenger network.
He has since increased membership rolls at TRAC by
more than ten percent.
Bob Reynolds is a second-
generation Californian. His
ancestors and relatives
have worked on American
Iron Cross since the mid-
hundreds, some getting killed
during the notorious early
days. He has traveled on
the rails in Europe and
Asia and has visited many

RANDALL HANSEN
Sacramento County
TREASURER
Born in New York and raised on Long Island, Randall
graduated from Hofstra University with a major in Management
and a minor in Accounting.
He has been actively promot-
ing rail for 8 years, but riding
for much longer. Randall got
involved in California's
local bus system, the Long Is-
land Railroad, and New York
subways. Because he thought he was always going
to be a New Yorker and was proud to use transit, he decided
how far to drive until he was 19.
Riding Amtrak trains around the US, he fell in love
with California and knew he had to explore it further.
Having moved to Northern California, first
working in retail, then moving on to a fiscal job in
state service.
In Sacramento, he commutes via light rail and
bus.
Randall wants to see expansion of local transit
systems, improvements to Amtrak, and construction
of high-speed rail. He has published letters in USA
Today, the Sacramento Bee, and US News & World
Report advocating more government investment in
passenger rail. Randall believes membership expan-
sion is a top goal because it will give TRAC a stronger
advocate voice with Sacramento lawmakers and local leaders.

LAURA BALDERREE
Alameda County
VICE-PRESIDENT
Like many Americans, Laura grew up with
the opportunity to ride
passenger trains. She was
born in July 1955 and the
last passenger train left
the depot in her home
town in August 1955.
Fortunately, on a youth
summer trip to Europe she
discovered the many ad-
vantages of quality public
transportation and has
been a rider and advocate
ever since. She has ridden
most of Amtrak's routes at least once, commutes
to work on the Capitol Corridor trains, and has been
an active member of TRAC and NARP.
On the local public transportation level, she
has worked on expanding sales tax measures and served on
the board of the Alliance for AC Transit. She appreciates the
wider focus that
TRAC has as a state-wide organization and welcomes
the opportunity to be an advocate for improved
passenger rail service across California as well as better rail
connections between California and our neighboring
states.

MOE MOHANNA
Sacramento County
VICE-PRESIDENT
Moe Mohanna emigrated to the United States from Iran
in the late 1960’s when he was in his late teens. His early years in
the country were as an engineer-

ing student in the Boston area,

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ing student in the Boston area,
by Randell Hansen
TRAC Treasurer

Developments in Washington since the summer have been positive for passenger rail and transit but some key rail supporters won’t be returning to Congress.

The Senate convened after summer and passed on September 12th by a vote of 88-7 HR 3074, the FY 2008 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Bill (THUD). In it includes $3 million for Metrolink’s Ferris Valley line extension, $3 million for the South Sacramento light-rail extension, $70 million for LA’s Gold Line eastside extension, and even $500,000 for Oakland to develop housing at transit-oriented villages.

Also included in the bill is the repeal of the 1985 ban on further tunneling under LA’s Wilshire Blvd. While that’s good news for Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa’s vision of a “subway to the sea,” funding sources need to be identified. Feinstein’s vote was a “yes” and Boxer’s was “not voting” according to the US Senate’s roll call page.

After Congressional passage of other budgets, President Bush either vetoed or allowed to pass on September 12th by a vote of 70-22.

There were attempts by Senators Susan (R-NH), Coburn (R-OK), and DeMint (R-SC) to add amendments which would have undermined the bill’s objective by either requiring more routes be privatized, food service to be discontinued if the losses exceed a certain amount, or for Amtrak to disclose each ticket subsidy.

Fortunately all of the amendments were overwhelmingly defeated. Senator Boxer voted against the amendments and “yes” on S. 294. Feinstein was in San Diego touring the areas affected by the wildfires and wasn’t able to vote. The House is scheduled to either take up S. 294 or offer its own bill by Rep. Jim Oberstar (D-MN) in February.

On October 17, the House approved HR 2095, the Federal Railroad Safety Improvement Act, by a vote of 377-38. One of the items in the bill is language from Congresswoman Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY) that would allow local rail operators apply for a quality-of-life waiver from horn requirements.

The Long Island Railroad, the nation’s largest commuter rail operator which serves the congested Long Island district, has received citizen complaints about the loud horn noise from their DM-30AC locomotives. The old M1 units on their electric lines and GP-38 locomotives of certain DM-30AC horns but at the piercingly loud decibel levels the DM-30AC’s produce. Sacramento residents have also had a quality of life issue with Regal Translax rail car horns...

Despite the accomplishments, Amtrak is losing key supporters. S.294’s co-author, Senator Trent Lott (R-MS) resigned from the Senate effective January 1st, apparently to avoid looming ethics restrictions that set limits on lobbying by former legislators.

His successor as Minority Whip is Jon Kyl (AZ), who voted for all of the anti-Amtrak amendments and “no” on S.294. Since Senator Kyl has the same anti-rail voting record as his colleague John McCain it seems that Amtrak’s strongest Republican voice will be Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson (TX). However, she announced earlier this year that she’ll be retiring at the end of 2012 and John Warner (R-VA) also will be retiring at the end of 2008.

It’s important that their successors will be critical of rail and transit regard less of which political party they’re from. Voters need to communicate their views to candidates and the Democratic elected officials about rail and transit so they know how important rail is to the voting public in mitigating air pollution, traffic, greenhouse gas emissions, and America’s heavy dependence on foreign oil.

California’s two leading advocacy agencies for rail passenger service have settled issues between them and regret the filing of lawsuits, and such lawsuits will be dismissed. All of the Parties seek efficient, safe, environmentally-friendly passenger transportation by enhancing and developing America’s intercity rail resources.

As a gesture of goodwill, TRAC and RAILPAC are making a joint donation to the National Association of Rail Passengers (NARP) to help organize meetings and cover the costs of the groups participating in joint tasks in their efforts to promote rail passenger service in California and nationwide.

The European High Speed network saw many extensions in 2007. The French TGV-East line pushed south and east to the German border. Britain’s first true high speed rail line was extended to a showy new London-Buongor station and Spanish St. Pancras station and Spain’s AVE pushed south and east, with the goal of 4350 high speed track miles by 2010.

That would be a long way by the U.S. to set... 19 EUROS BECAME A MAGIC PRICE, as numerous European rail and bus operators found that level set loose new travel. 19 Euros is the fare for any 5 Bavarians traveling together after 6 PM. Just 19 Euros will buy you a trip on the world’s fastest train between Paris and Strasbourg, a few weeks ahead on the IDTGV site... WEATHER-RELATED track jumped into several more Southwest services in late January. The entire Coast Starlight service was discontinued from January 20 to date unknown due to mud slides in Oregon. AMTRAK passengers were stranded just east of Chatsworth by a rock slide January 25. A RELAUNCH OF THE COAST STARLIGHT is slated for February, with the trains include at-seat cart food and upgrading the Pacific Parlour Car with meals, wine-tasting, specialty coffee, and a library. A new schedule and new loading procedures will be instituted at Los Angeles... MEGABUS rail ties have now been cut east of the New Mexico border stop for the San Diego line, a Phoenix stop for the Tempe Arizona line, and a Millbrae stop on one of the San Francisco lines. Fares available on most routes several weeks out, with the San Diego route never getting very pricey. Las Vegas has been pared to 3 round trips. The LA-Tempe route appears to be gone from January 7... VIRGIN AMERICA jumped into several more Southwest markets on the West Coast with new offers of SFO-Las Vegas $49, SFO-San Diego $29, SFO-Seattle $77 and LAS-Seattle $134. Virgin America appears to be a sharper threat than Megabus to existing air and ground carriers...

A FEDERAL RESEARCH STIMULUS bill worth $357 billion intercity rail plan, drawing a retort from the AAR. The Passenger Rail Working Group of the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission conceived a plan thru 2050 to improve intercity passenger rail service. However, the AAR says the proposal relies too much on the freight rail network and that passengers will not be satisfied by the service compromises. “Piggy-backing on privately owned and operated freight railroad assets will give America a third-rate passenger rail service that is not attractive to passengers or competitive with automobile and air travel,” said AAR President and CEO Edward Hamberger. Amtrak retorted... a new AAR cooperation by freight railroads on a joint attempt to obtain funding using the familiar 90/10 split for rail projects...
Public-spirited citizens trying to make sense of real estate deals may understandably assume everyone is acting in good faith. Since the 1990’s Red Line cave-in scandals, California is still all too naive about how land speculators and elected officials manipulate projects and corrupt them for personal gain.

SMART GROWTH ON WETLANDS

Planners and even gullible transit advocates are convinced a new rail line is needed to support high density growth in a proposed pedestrian pocket, which just happens to be located on low-lying land subject to frequent flooding or sea level rise. The land is a barrier for those who think state and federal agencies would allow it to be built on.

WE NEED TO MOVE THE STATION

Popular these days in Sacramento, with the Alstom Station and at least 3 light rail stations affected currently. The common denominators are huge cost, negative environmental impacts, and destruction of rideability. The prime motivating factor is development.

Pacheco a Recipe for High Speed Rail Stalemate

By Melissa Hippard and Dan Taylor

The success of a bullet train to Southern California rides on the route the California High-Speed Rail Authority chooses between the Altamont Pass route (on Dec. 17 Ed. Note) it is scheduled to review soon and the Pacheco route. The Amtrak station was elegantly shoehorned into the Capitol Mall and J Street near the Capitol is available from it. The new $40 million remote platforms demanded by UP are to be situated 1100 feet away from the Union Pacific tracks. Sacramento is vying with other California cities for scarce bond funding to pay for Union Pacific’s track move. However, its land value manipulating scams should not be confused with smart growth or transit projects. An alliance of K Street business interests has filed a suit to block the Railyards project on security and access to jobs from Capitol commemoration.

DETOUR TO SERVE MINORITIES

Providing rail transportation to deserving low-income communities is a tremendously compelling argument for the Railyards project. A joint statement by several注: names not included here. organizations for the Railyards project is typically provided by advocates who see a potential to turn low-cost land into condos and lofts. That most cities mean measures get pushed out of the gentrified neighborhoods served by rail.

THE NEVER-BUILT RAIL LINE

Lines on the map help speculators pocket cover over often all they need to own their pull-voters into buying land of dubious value that the planning department is likely to overlook. The basic argument for these projects is typically provided by advocates who see a potential to turn low-cost land into condos and lofts. That most cities mean measures get pushed out of the gentrified neighborhoods served by rail.

WIRING THE BLACK BOX MODEL

A nationally renowned firm is hired to model current and future rail lines. The new $40 million remote platforms demanded by UP are to be situated 1100 feet away from the Union Pacific tracks. Sacramento is vying with other California cities for scarce bond funding to pay for Union Pacific’s track move. However, its land value manipulating scams should not be confused with smart growth or transit projects. An alliance of K Street business interests has filed a suit to block the Railyards project on security and access to jobs from Capitol commemoration.

BLAMING ENVIRONMENTALISTS

When a corrupt planning process produces cost overruns, one obvious target is always environmentalists. This has been true since the Bay Bridge hearings 10 years ago. It works, irrespective of the facts, because business community and some interest groups are predetermined to agree.

Putting the squeeze on transit users, the city would wrap the St. Rose station with a conversion which appears to have less than standard ADA clearances.

The proposed site of St. Rose of Lima station directly serves a wellness hotel and one of Central Valley’s finest liquor outlets.

DOWNTOWN MELISSA HIPPA RD is the Loma Prieta Chapter director of the Sierra Club and the Planning Resources Defense Council and the Planning.

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leader in working to provide help to the Sacramento homeless. Says Mohanna, “I've noticed that volunteer- ing has come up on my radar recently and I have learned and enjoyed doing a lot of volunteer work with a lot of wonderful friends and people.”

MIKE MCGINLEY Los Angeles County
A native of Glendale, CA, and a registered civil engi- neer, Mike’s career spans three stages of rail trans- portation: operations and maintenance of way for the Southern Pacific (18 years), design and con- sulting (5 years), and construction and maintenance operations for Metrolink in Los Angeles (34 years).

Mike believes that advocacy for practical, incremen- tal, affordable public investment in transportation infrastructure and operation must be based on sound knowledge of the existing conditions, current practice for design, construction, maintenance, and operations, and with a voice of how planners in future decades will utilize and build upon the projects we develop. Preserving the existing rights of way for the transportation needs of the future is a starting point.

VICTOR RAMPULLA Los Angeles County
Victor has been employed for 38 years by the County of Los Angeles as a member of the Executive positions of Division Directors, including the Director of the Depart- ment of Public Works in Los Angeles (14 years).

He has traveled extensively throughout the United States and Canada on long distance trains, and is a frequent user of California train services such as the Pacific Surfliner.

Victor believes the next few years are critical to the fu- ture of passenger train service and TRAC must remain a “Front Line” player in this area. He believes TRAC’s immediate objectives must be the protection of long distance train service, and establishment of more frequent inter-city rail service in California.

BART REED Los Angeles County
Bart Reed is Director of The Transit Coalition; a San Fernando Valley based organization dealing with transportation policy planning and land use issues.

In this capacity, he is a na- tionally recognized transit transportation systems and solutions expert. He frequently travels to Washington, D.C. and Sacramento to educate elected officials on the role of passenger rail and bus transportation issues. He produces and conducts outreach programs and meetings to organize support for public transit initiatives.

Bart developed and promoted the Metrolink Max pass program, collaborating with Yvonne Paris, Richard Tolmach and Michael McGinley. This program increased service running every 30 minutes on four Los Angeles County routes. Along with Jerard Wright, Reed has promoted the Metro Downtown Regional Connector, which is currently undergoing Alternatives Analysis. Additionally, he helped promote the recent study of the Harbor Subdivision, which could bring Metrolink service to the South Bay and Los Angeles International Airport.

AL SHADBOURNE Los Angeles County
Al Shadbourne retired after over 39 years of professional design and development work in diesel engine design.

He has been an active member with the Garrett Corpora- tion Automotive Exhaust Products Division, the world’s large- est diesel engine turbocharger manufacturer (now known as Honeywell). He held many engineering positions including Chief Engineer, President of the Los Angeles Chamber (a local pedestrian advocacy organization). His involvement and inter- est in passenger car rail service continued with weekend trips to the railways with his father and daily travel to high school on the Southern Pacific Railroad. He became a member of the Pacific Railroad Society for over 20 years. He even carries his interest in rail to the point of investment wherein he owns and are the proud owners of several small tank cars currently in revenue service. Al has been active in the distribution of CRM in south- ern California.

Al has always been a promoter of energy conservation. He drives a Prius, makes over 90,000 miles of elec- trical power each day with photovoltaic panels on his home and has a solar hot water heating system for over 20 years. He believes the promotion of passenger rail is an element in reducing our nation’s energy consumption.

RICH TOLMACH Sacramento County
Rich Tolmach retired from Caltrans in October after 33 years planning and analyzing rail improvements. He participated in many of the key decisions that brought new train service to California in the 70’s. But, in the 90’s he helped to found TRAC and over the time he has devoted about 600 hours annually to TRAC’s efforts to promote and improve California’s rail services.

He favors promotion of new services, such as regional commuter improvements to use existing infrastruc- ture. He is proud that ideas TRAC has advanced like hourly timed connections at Los Angeles and a regional network of rail service throughout Southern California have gained currency. He believes progress will come from alliances with key stakeholders including the Planning and Conservation League, and the Transportation Solu- tions Center. AmeriCorps Regional Program. He lobbied for the Development of the Connector, currently in Alternatives Analysis.

He is currently Chair of Metro's Westside/Cen- tral City Governmental Relations Council. He is also Vice President of The Transit Coalition and has been an active member with Caltrans Out of the Box Club for over 5 years.

In addition, he is a regular user of public transportation since he organizes all of his travel and activities to be done without an automobile.

He graduated from Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) with a BA in Architecture, minoring in City and Regional Planning. At IIT he was active in Student government and helped lobby the CTA to bring back the “U-Pass” discount pass. He is an advocate of carefully designed Transit Oriented Developments (TOD) emphasizing the transit first, rather than as an afterthought.

He resides in Downtown Los Angeles working as a Construction Assistant for the Alhambra Unified School District. He also performs architectural, design and construction work through his firm, the Wright Concept. One such concept is the Downtown Regional Connector (DRC), presented at the March 3-4, 2007 NARP/PTC conference at Metro Gateway Head- quarters. The Connector, currently in Alternatives Analy- sis, is one of the top performing projects in Metro’s Long Range Transit Plan.

ANNA MARIÉ YOUNG Sacramento County
Anna Marié Young is a UC Davis student, completing a degree in Community and Re- gional Development with an emphasis in Transporta- tion Planning and Policy.

Her particular focus is on the development of pedestrian and transit networks and the interface between the two. She resides in Sacramento and commutes to Davis via bicycle and a 12 minute train ride on Amtrak’s Capitol Corridor Route.

After she graduated high school in Boise, ID she joined AmericaCorps National Civilian Community Corps. In 2005, she moved to Stockton to take advantage of the UC School and University System. As a College of the Americas student, Anna Marie led the efforts to sub- scribe bus service for rural community college students. In 2005 she moved to Sacramento to continue her education at UC Davis. Anna Marie has par- ticipated in a summer abroad program in Scandinavia and Germany, studying landscape architecture and transportation policy.

She is currently interning for the California Trans- portation Commission (I-5 Connecting the State), a (local pedestrian advocacy organization). For the CTC, she has been helping to update the Regional Transporta- tion Plan’s guidelines for planning practices that will help the State reach its Green House Gas reduction goals.

For WALC Sacramento, she is developing a plan to improve walking, bicycle, and transit access to Four Community Colleges in the Sacramento region.

Steve Weigand in the Sacramento Bee 12/20/2007: HIGH SPEED RAIL GOING NOWHERE

Turns out, as a Sacramentan, I wouldn’t be allowed to use the train for a very long time. Neither would people in San Diego, Riverside, San Bernardino, Modesto or Stockton. We’d only get to watch from a distance as the bul- let train was built for the coastal cities of San Francisco, San Jose, Fresno, Bakersfield, Palmdale, Los Angeles and Anaheim. San Diego and the Inland Empire were cut out of the action in the May by the California High- Speed Rail Authority. Last week, Modesto, Stockton and Sacramento were excluded, at least for the foreseeable future. This happened when the authority approved a Facheq Pass route from the San Joaquin Valley to the Bay Area – a path through rural Los Banos roughly 60 miles south of an alternative Altamont Pass route near fast-growing Tracy. If the bullet line had been extended north to Modesto, it would have served Modesto and Stockton. And then it might have been feasible to lay another 40 miles of track to the state capital...

From 1/20/08 KCBS radio interview of HSRA Board Member Rod Diridon responding to reporter’s question: How do you think that selected route will affect the bond measure’s popularity in November, if at all?

“I don’t think it’s… I think it’s going to help it! Because it certainly will bring in all of uh, the very large population in the Santa Cruz Bay. It’s also going to, uh, it’s also going to, uh, in, uh, in, your, uh, the large popula- tion on the West Bay Peninsula cities and the, uh, they’re going to be able to get to, the rest of the state, all which will be served by the Facheq route. Ah, and I think there’s a huge amount of uh, voter support and population in those areas.”

———

George Skelton in the Los Angeles Times 12/24/2007: Six years ago on this date, I wrote that “California needs an electric train set for Christmas… Santa still hasn’t come through. He had in mind a big train set that’s 700 miles long with locomotive barreling at 200 mph. A bullet train. To be honest, I’m no longer as excited about it as I once was, anyway. Turns out, as a Sacramentan, I wouldn’t be allowed to use the train for a very long time. Neither would people in San Diego, Riverside, San Bernardino, Modesto or Stockton. We’d only get to watch from a distance as the bul- let train was built for the coastal cities of San Francisco, San Jose, Fresno, Bakersfield, Palmdale, Los Angeles and Anaheim. San Diego and the Inland Empire were cut out of the action in the May by the California High-Speed Rail Authority. Last week, Modesto, Stockton and Sacramento were excluded, at least for the foreseeable future. This happened when the authority approved a Facheq Pass route from the San Joaquin Valley to the Bay Area – a path through rural Los Banos roughly 60 miles south of an alternative Altamont Pass route near fast-growing Tracy. If the bullet line had been extended north to Modesto, it would have served Modesto and Stockton. And then it might have been feasible to lay another 40 miles of track to the state capital…

In 2005 she moved to Sacramento to continue her education at UC Davis. Anna Marie has participated in a summer abroad program in Scandinavia and Germany, studying landscape architecture and transportation policy.

She is currently interning for the California Trans-
A coalition of 8 land, environmental and transportation organizations presented unified testimony on November 14 critical of High-speed Rail Authority staff findings regarding Bay-Central Valley routings.

Attorney Stuart Flashman spoke representing the following groups who submitted comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Bay Area to Central Valley High Speed Rail Connection: Sierra Club, Planning and Conservation League, California Rail Foundation, Defenders of Wildlife, the Transportation Solution Defense and Education Fund, Grassland Water District, Grassland Legal Defense Planning and Conservation League, among others.

The Rail Authority staff is proposing a “hybrid” project as the preferred alternative. This would primarily be the Pacheco alignment linking San Francisco and San Jose to Southern California, and secondarily a regional rail line linking the Northern Central Valley to Oakland and San Jose, but NOT San Francisco, via the Altamont corridor.

The staff supports this proposal as minimizing environmental impacts; yet the Final Environmental Impact Report is not yet complete, and there is good reason to question the analysis and conclusions presented in the Draft EIR.

Staff’s decision to throw its support behind the Pacheco alignment as the primary preferred route shows prejudice, in the literal sense. Staff has prejudged the impacts when not all the evidence has been presented. In a court, this would be like deciding a case for the prosecution before the defense has even presented its witnesses.

The staff recommendation, like the comments of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, asserts a newly-found appreciation for wetlands impacts along the Bay from Altamont to Bay crossing. It would be nice if there was an equal appreciation for the far larger and at least as significant Grassland wetlands that would be impacted by having the Pacheco alignment slide right through the middle of them.

In addition, they ignore the potential for the high speed rail line to use the rehabilitated Dumbarton Rail Corridor Bridge, at least in the short run, and to use High Speed Rail funding for bridge improvements that would actually reduce existing impacts on Bay wetlands – a positive safety and part of the reason the Bay Wetlands Committee to Complete the Refuge, among other environmental groups, has endorsed Altamont and opposes Pacheco.

The staff recommendation notes that, at the project level, there would be opportunities to mitigate or avoid impacts on GEA, but makes no analogous comment about mitigating impacts on Bay wetlands. If staff is willing to allow for project-level mitigation of GEA impacts, why not for Bay wetlands? Fairness requires even-handed treatment of the two situations.

Beyond the incomplete picture of environmental impacts, the Draft EIR for the project is also flawed by erroneous assumptions about project logistics and economics. These errors have been repeatedly pointed out in comment letters, yet staff persists. Again, this seems to show prejudice.

The ridership analysis accompanying the DEIR asserts that trains can only go to one Bay Area location. It ignores the well-established practice of train splitting and joining commonly used in European high speed rail systems. If train splits were allowed, Altamont ridership would greatly exceed that for Pacheco.

The revenue analysis also assumes fares must be directly proportionate to distance. Using this assumption, the analysis asserts that revenue for Bay Area to Sacramento travel via Pacheco will equal that via Altamont because the Pacheco routing is longer, and hence would have higher fares.

The analysis doesn’t adequately consider, however, that higher fares will mean lower ridership. The Pacheco routing to Sacramento would already be disfavored because it would take roughly sixty percent longer to get there. Why anyone would pay a higher fare to get slower service is a mystery that is hard to understand.

Another mystery is how the Pacheco alignment is able to entice more than twice as many intransit Bay Area “recreational and other” riders compared to Altamont. Where are all these people coming from and going to? Gilroy? I’m sorry, the Gilroy Garlic Festival is nice, but it won’t attract an extra one million riders. The figures are simply not credible.

Finally, while the staff recommendation appears superficially to offer something to both sides, it only offers funding for the Pacheco alignment. Without funding, an alignment is nothing more than a pipe-dream. The staff recommendation, if adopted by the Board, will almost certainly lead to the defeat of the high speed rail bond measure, if it even gets to the ballot, and then there will be no funding for either alignment. Is the Board interested in building a high speed rail system, or a pipe-dream?

Why anyone would pay a higher fare to get to an inferior product is a mystery. Because the Pacheco routing is longer, and fares would already be disfavored because it would take roughly sixty percent longer to get there. Why anyone would pay a higher fare to get slower service is a mystery that is hard to understand.

The speed claims fall apart under scrutiny. Speeds for sound walls, relocation of streets, and 38 grade-separations of the line that would allow such speeds don’t seem to be included in Gilroy–San Jose cost estimates. That’s enough to raise a bit of dust in Blossom Hill, Morgan Hill, San Martin and Gilroy especially southbound with operating speeds up to 200 mph, instead of 186 mph northbound.

The EIR/EIS published by the Authority misrepresents maximum train speeds as being much lower. For example, prominently placed Figure 4-3.1 shows the same segment with speeds of “100 to 150 mph” maximum. The speed claims fail apart under scrutiny. Costs for sound walls, relocation of streets, and 38 grade-separations of the line that would allow such speeds don’t seem to be included in Gilroy–San Jose cost estimates. That’s enough to raise a bit of dust in Blossom Hill, Morgan Hill, San Martin and Gilroy especially southbound with operating speeds up to 200 mph, instead of 186 mph northbound.

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We are grateful to Carl Morrison for use of extracts from his excellent summary of the CalRail 2020 conference. His full text, with many more photos is available at http://trainweb.org/carl/TRAC2007/

The November 2 CalRail 2020 Conference hosted by Caltrans at its new district campus in Old Town San Diego, featured a strong set of presentations on the status of California rail development plans.

Richard Phelps, VP of Transportation for Amtrak, flanked by Jack Rich, Director of Product Management and Joe Yannuzzi, Gen. Sup. of the SW Div. gave a ‘State of Amtrak’ address. Phelps highlighted Amtrak’s recent revenue growth, with $1.5 billion in ticket revenue last year, up 8 percent. He reported that on-time performance is also up, with 78 percent of western trains arriving on time. Challenges to the California program include a high rate of locomotive failure and shortage of rail cars due to ridership growth.

Patrick Merrill of Caltrans Division of Rail presented a state-level view, and collaborated with Phelps in answering questions posed to Amtrak, providing many details of interest.

In California, since 2001 there has been a 35 percent increase in ridership. Two Superliner cars have already been refurbished to add to the Northern California fleet, and a further five are being refurbished for Surfliner duty. Addition of a second daily train between Los Angeles and the Bay Area via the Coast Route figures heavily in Caltrans planning, and is the next state-supported service likely to be implemented. Quik-Trak machines are being added in Los Angeles and San Diego, and progress is hoped for on Amtrak tickets from joint Metrolink-Amtrak ticket machines. George Chilson, President of the National Association of Railroad Passengers, gave a presentation about the NARP Vision Plan for the future of passenger rail in the US. Mr. Chilson asked how many of the 100 attendees did not have internet access. He counted three. He then announced that attendees should go to the NARP website to see the national map, which shows numerous new desired lines, particularly in the Midwest.

Josh Shaw, Executive Director of the California Transit Association, talked about his organization’s decision to sue to reclaim a good portion of the $1.3 billion in transit funds illegally diverted to the general fund in the last budget process.

Shaw also spoke of an initiative to protect all state transit funds from diversion, preventing the shell games which got around the intent of Proposition 1A by simply diverting funds not specifically protected. He observed that since 2000, $3 billion of funds originally dedicated to transit by Sen. James R. Mill’s Transportation Development Act of 1972 had been extracted to prop up the General Fund.

In the state fiscal 2007-08 budget, $100 million of transit funds became grants for Home to School busing. This went for yellow school buses, not the mass transit use specified by law. $130 million was diverted to Regional Disabled Centers, an admirable goal, but again not a legal use. $950 million of transit funds was used to pay the bond debt service on previously issued bonds, another improper use.

To read Mr. Shaw’s documents for this litigation and for current status of the case, go to: http://caltransit.org

As advertised, a double-set of Sprinter diesel articulated cars was standing at new tracks at Oceanside Sunday morning, awaiting conference attendees. This excursion was, in fact, the first time the Sprinter had made an Oceanside - Escondido trip with public riders on board. Full service is now expected to begin in March, 2008.

Photos: © Carl Morrison, trainweb.org

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