

California Rail News

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UNRESPONSIVE BUREAUCRACY, FRAGMENTED SERVICE POSE HURDLES

by Michael D. Setty

In early April 2015, SPUR, a long-established and highly respected urban issues think tank with roots in the era immediately following the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, released "Seamless Transit: How to make Bay Area public transit function like one rational, easy-to-use system." The SPUR report recommends that Bay Area transit be reformed to provide seamless travel across the region's fragmented collection of transit providers.

Over the past three decades, per capita transit ridership has declined markedly in the Bay Area, despite more than \$5 billion being expended since 1980, mostly for BART extensions to outlying suburbs and San Francisco International Airport. Despite increasing overcrowding on a few key transit corridors, overall Bay Area transit usage has stagnated, with the overall regional

transit market share declining to about 3 percent.

According to SPUR, the large number of independent systems makes it very difficult to understand the overall transit network. Transit map design varies widely, and schedules, fares and capital planning are mostly uncoordinated. Fragmentation makes it very difficult to meet goals such as sustainability and coordinating development of jobs and housing around transit hubs. SPUR believes that, by integrating Bay Area transit to function as one, easy-to-use network, transit's market share can be increased and it will be much easier to actually meet regional goals.

SPUR sees five barriers that the Bay Area needs to surmount to improve the transit riding experience:

- Inadequate information on how to

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NO STUDIES OF I-5
HSR OPTION, EVER

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Seamless Transit

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- make a multi-operator trip
- Difficult transfers between operators
 - Financial penalties for riders using more than one operator
 - Limitations of fare payment technology
 - Gaps and duplication in the region's transit network

The SPUR report detail a number of these problems. Most transit operators provide incomplete information regarding how to make multi-operator trips, and often, individual transit operators use different terminology, their own idiosyncratic vehicles, unique map designs and system signage.

Transfers are often hard to make, with problems ranging from uncoordinated schedules, varying frequencies, to long walking distances between stops. Examples include the long distance between San Francisco Ferry Building docks and entrances to the Embarcadero BART station, long blocks between BART's Market Street stations and the Transbay Terminal (a problem not solved by the new \$2 billion facility now under construction), and nearly 0.4 mile between the proposed SMART rail station in Larkspur and the Larkspur Ferry Terminal docks. This seems to be the Bay Area norm.

Also, few joint fares are offered, with the notable exception of the joint BART/S.F. Muni monthly pass offered by San Francisco. BART fares aren't usable on AC Transit buses, Vallejo Ferry riders must pay a large premium to transfer to S.F. Muni, non-Muni riders must pay additional fares to transfer to/from feeder buses, and so forth. As SPUR points out, in other cities such as New York, coordinated fare structures and payment methods have greatly increased ridership.

SPUR notes inadequacies of the obsolete regional Clipper fare payment system run by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). Clipper cannot integrate smart phone payments or add fare value without a trip to a fare machine. Thanks to proprietary technology and complexity, Clipper can offer only a handful of potential fare discounts to transit riders.

There are also significant gaps in transit service or unnecessary duplication. For example, only recently has the North Bay east-west gap in service been filled, and it still requires use of three different routes, each with its own individual fare and very infrequent service.

SPUR sees great potential in reform: "With a truly seamless network, people in the Bay Area would know how their regional transit system works. Great local transit would be highly visible and leveraged as the building block of a strong regional network. New transit infrastructure would be designed for easy connections. And new transit service would be directed to the routes where there was demand, even if they crossed operator service boundaries."

SPUR recommends following the lead of metropolitan regions around the world where different operators function together like a single network. It suggests the following key elements for success:

1. Focus on improving customer experience
2. Leadership, trust and sustained partnership
3. Business practices that improve collaboration and revenue generation

Consolidating some transit operators might be part of the solution, but a focus on mergers can be a distraction from the other ways we can improve the system.

SPUR recommends five strategies for integrating Bay Area transit:

Strategy 1: Help travelers understand the value of the region's transit system and how to use it.

Strategy 2: Standardize fares and develop passes that encourage use of the region's entire transit system.

Strategy 3: Develop transit hubs that make transferring easy.

Strategy 4: Use an integrated approach to

transit network design.

Strategy 5: Use institutional practices to promote integration.

SPUR recommends that Bay Area transit be marketed as one regional system, including consistent graphic design in maps, terminology, symbols used, service naming and so forth. MTC should lead an effort to develop a region-wide transit map, perhaps using S.F. Muni's new map design that more clearly designates frequencies and service types than its older design (see <http://www.sfmta.com/projects-planning/projects/new-muni-map>).

The report also recommends updating Clipper to better incorporate multi-operator regional transit passes and other fare options designed to maximize regional transit ridership. Fare revenues should be shared between operators, and there should be a temporary fund to hold operators "whole" for fare revenue losses when fares are integrated on the regional level. Clipper should be upgraded to enable mobile ticketing through smart phones and other devices, and should include rider loyalty programs and integration with other mobility options including car sharing, bike parking and bike sharing. Transit stations with connections between multiple operators can be greatly improved. Consistent information presentation and design is essential.

Although many report findings may be obvious to transit users, its publication is invaluable because it summarizes how the Bay Area's transit problems can be fixed in a single place where politicians and activists can reference them.

SPUR recommends that MTC and transit operators develop integrated transit planning, including a "corridor-based" planning approach to deal with congestion (and rapidly increasing transit overcrowding) in the Bay Bridge and Peninsula corridors, and work with the "big data" now available to improve transit operations and the transit customer experience.

"...Regional transit expansion investments should be made in the context of the entire network..." which implies that investments should not be made simply on the basis of satisfying political expediency or the narrow interests of a particular transit operator or sub-region.

SPUR doesn't call for merger of all the Bay Area transit operators, an obvious nonstarter that doomed prior attempts at service consolidation. Instead, it asks that all levels of transit funding—local, regional, state and federal—provide strong incentives to MTC and transit operators to pursue consolidations "that make the most sense."

The SPUR report is available online at <http://www.spur.org/publications/spur-report/2015-03-31/seamless-transit>

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2040 Draft Transportation Plan Is Impressive Effort

CALTRANS TACKLES CLIMATE CHANGE

**Opinion by David Schonbrunn,
TRAC Vice-President for Policy**

The unimaginable has occurred: Caltrans has released an environmentally oriented California Transportation Plan (CTP)! The CTP is the much-needed first step in transforming Caltrans into a 21st Century agency. The SSTI Assessment and Recommendations Report (2014) observed that “Caltrans today is significantly out of step with best practice in the transportation field and with the state of California’s policy expectations.”

The CTP is the first Caltrans policy document since the SSTI report to correct that mismatch. This extraordinary plan is a courageous response to SB 391, a 2009 law that directed Caltrans to prepare a plan that shows how the State would reduce its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in response to the challenges of climate change. The draft CTP has now completed its public comment period.

With motor vehicles as the largest source of GHGs in California, an essential part of GHG reduction is reducing motor vehicle use. For the first time, Caltrans has acknowledged that reducing GHGs will require reducing Vehicle Miles Travelled (VMT).

The CTP’s most striking component is its recognition that achievement of the mandated 80% reduction in GHG emissions by 2050 will require ending Caltrans’ historic role as highway builder: “Road capacity enhancing strategies were rejected due to concerns these would ultimately increase VMT.”

Transportation planning in California has always assumed solo driving to be the default travel choice. Highways were designed to provide enough capacity for most users to drive alone. Moving away from past plans’ approach of ever-increasing highway capacity is an extraordinarily profound transformation.

Change is Afoot

This CTP changes the paradigm to one where the State is no longer funding system expansion of solo travel. Instead, expansion funding goes to carpool, transit and active modes. Despite the individualism that has long dominated American culture, the Plan gently hints that we are all in this together. California’s urban areas will become more like Europe and Japan, with their prominent transit and active modes.

Ending highway widening will be a major shock to the contractor/local government/ CMA/MPO/CTC/Legislature ecosystem. While Caltrans will still have the considerable responsibility of maintaining its aging facilities, the State’s capacity expansion program will build rail and transit projects instead. This change to the status quo will inevitably encounter resistance and backlash.

Transportation leaders will need to shift their focus to improving mobility without increasing VMT. (Recent countywide transportation plans in the Bay Area show a 35% increase in VMT between now and 2040. These trends must be reversed if GHG reduction goals are to be achieved.) City and county leaders will need to shift their focus to planning for development that does not increase VMT.



Continued freeway expansion is a dead end.

Change is likely to be especially difficult for county agencies and for the California Transportation Commission. These bodies have very conservative practices, by which highway projects remain on their lists for decades. While the CTP doesn’t control future projects, consistency with it would require the review and reorientation of approximately \$103 billion in highway and local road system expansion projects. At stake is nothing less than how counties see themselves growing in the future. This will be very contentious.

The CTP is the first time that the State has identified what it will take in the transportation field to realistically meet the challenges of climate change. Governor Brown’s Executive Order of April 29 sets a goal of a 40% reduction in GHG emissions by 2030. However, Californians have not yet been asked to mobilize to support a reduction in GHGs. We need leaders to explain why this shift to a less carbon-intensive economy is needed now.

We Have to Change

Transportation networks cannot be expanded further in urban areas to adequately support solo driving during peak periods, because we don’t have the space in our cities and costs are prohibitive. Without continuing expansion, the solo-driving-based system will inevitably descend into gridlock. Climate change and congestion have finally forced reconsideration of the conventional wisdom.

The congestion relief and VMT reduction called for by the CTP will require much more carpooling. That is why my one policy disagreement with the draft CTP is its refusal to oppose HOT lanes. The sole purpose for High-Occupancy Toll lanes (sometimes repackaged as managed lanes or Express Lanes) is to make it easier to drive alone. They discourage carpooling.

The CTP recognized that the replacement of fossil-fueled vehicles with zero-emissions vehicles was insufficient to meet the GHG reduction goal. It identified the need to raise the price of driving. Road pricing (tolling) is recognized as the most effective disincentive to driving alone. I prefer the revenue-neutral form of road pricing, where gas taxes or sales taxes are reduced as road pricing is implemented. To ensure that drivers in urban areas have a reasonable choice, pricing must be phased in as convenient new transit alternatives become available.

I urge TRAC members to support adoption of the California Transportation Plan 2040 and the transformational changes that are proposed.

Coast Observations

PRIVATE SECTOR RAIL proposals in Texas and Florida are advancing, but using different tactics than HSRA to deal with citizen opposition. Texas Central Railway’s proposal for a 240-mile HSR line between Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston to open in 2021 pledges that “the proposed project will not request or require grants or operational subsidies backed by taxpayers for its eventual construction and operation,” and that it will not build unless it convinces private investors... **TCR HOPES TO AVOID USE OF EMINENT DOMAIN** by proposing use of a corridor that combines highway rights of way with purchased utility rights of way to minimize taking of private land. Its web site includes a declaration that would please Californians fighting HSRA eminent domain proceedings: “Turning to eminent domain proceedings would only be a last resort, after all other voluntary options have been exhausted. The Project is committed to respecting and honoring the private property rights of our fellow Texans. This reflects our personal values and simply makes good business sense”... **IN FLORIDA, THE ALL ABOARD FLORIDA (AAF) project** on existing tracks owned by the Florida East Coast Railway also faces determined opposition, mostly in counties that its service will run through without stopping, at least initially... **SPEAKING OF TEXAS**, there is a plan to redesign and reroute I-45 through downtown Houston, which includes tearing down a short elevated freeway—potentially a big psychological first for the Lone Star State... **IRONICALLY**, Texas is “progressive” in some ways, such as Denton County’s innovative use of Swiss-designed lightweight diesel multiple units that meet FRA-mandated crash standards for joint operations on track shared with freights... **A NATIONAL JOURNAL article** recently detailed “How Washington Derailed Amtrak” over the past 40+ years thanks to politics, traditionally due to a large minority of Congressional members who oppose Amtrak and rail funding... **HSRA CHAIR DAN RICHARD** is sounding as surrealistic as artist Salvador Dalí once was. Dalí had an obsession with the Perpignan train station in southern France, which he referred to in a 1963 declaration as being the “Center of the World.” Dan Richard has a similar idea about Palmdale, but would be more convincing if he didn’t cackle to himself each time he repeats his idea in public... **AT THE APRIL 29 PASSENGER RAIL SUMMIT** in Sacramento, Richard appeared to announce a new “Center.” He said it would take only 38 minutes from San Jose to Madera so it would be a good place for housing. HSRA has never announced a stop in Madera and Melissa Dumond, HSRA’s station specialist, said she was unable to clarify the comment since she didn’t hear it. Maybe the comment was only meant for insiders.

DEFICITS ON EUROPEAN HIGH-SPEED RAIL THREATENING REGIONAL TRAIN SUPPORT

SPANISH HSR FAILS TO COVER EVEN ITS OPERATING COSTS, AND IS FORCING CUTS TO BASIC TRAIN SERVICE ACROSS SPAIN. A CAUTIONARY TALE FOR CALIFORNIA?

by **Richard F. Tolmach**
TRAC President Emeritus

On March 27, 2015, a new study released by Fedea, (Foundation for the Study of Applied Economics) concluded that the 52 billion euro investment made in Spain's AVE high-speed rail network to date is "neither beneficial to businesses nor society" and is not offset by savings in airline fares or value of time previously spent driving.

Fedea, a free market-oriented Spanish think tank, found only three AVE routes cover direct operating expenses, and none come close to the level needed to cover capital costs. On the 1,562 miles currently in operation, demand is very low compared with other existing high-speed rail networks.

Fedea states, "Spain stands out for its leadership in providing infrastructure ... which contrasts with the limited use of it, far below other high-speed networks..."

Spain's AVE high-speed rail system has lived up to only a fraction of its hype, and the resulting financial cataclysm threatens to destroy what remains of that nation's conventional rail passenger network.

RIDERSHIP SHORTFALLS LEAKED

In Spain, Renfe, operator of both HSR and conventional service, is in financial free fall because operating costs of high speed rail turned out to be higher than experts claimed.

Claims by Renfe that AVE finally reached an annual ridership of 30 million passengers in 2014 have been offset by the revelation that the data includes all conventional long-distance trains as well as high-speed trains.

Similarly the reported gain of about 3.5 million rides turned out on closer examination to not be growth of traffic on existing high speed service, but largely due to opening of new lower-priced Avant regional services operated by regions using high speed tracks.

The earlier Spanish government projection of a doubling of traffic by 2020 to over 60 million annual passengers is no longer considered credible, because of the same game-playing.

Even worse for Renfe, closely held data on station boardings were leaked to a Catalan newspaper, which published them in February, causing a nationwide public relations problem. The data was explosive because it proved that new stations that cost millions of dollars have less traffic than old stops in the same cities where conventional service is being cut back. Resources are being directed to services with fewer passengers.

There is a political and social context to the diversion of funds. High speed trains are generally ridden by richer Partido Popular users, while lower income users represented by the parties of the left, which are not in the current government take the more affordable conventional trains, the ones targeted for cuts.

NEW ENGINEERING SCANDALS

Public concern about safety of the network did not diminish in the months after the crash of a "blended service" train bound from Madrid to Santiago de Compostela. Two subsequent floodings

of the new high speed tunnel through Girona caused the city government to challenge Spain's infrastructure manager ADIF about its engineering standards and to demand an independent investigation.

This year, relations between Catalonia and Madrid have not been comfortable. The floodings heated up an already contentious situation, and led to a flight to Madrid by the Girona mayor to talk directly to Parliament and the Minister of Development, Ana Pastor, an event gleefully covered by the Catalan press, which is increasingly skeptical about central government projects.

A second independent investigation is reportedly being carried out for the French government, which has concerns about the lines it uses for its through TGV trains between Paris, the South of France, Barcelona and Madrid. Structural work by the same firm that provided an exceptionally low bid for the second construction segment of California high speed rail is said to be one of the subjects for review.

DID SPANISH HSR EVER PENCIL?

Even in countries with heavy HSR demand, where many services cover their direct operating costs, only two lines on the planet so far have clearly met the definition of business profitability, e.g., not only covering operating costs but also covering capital. HSR can be profitable between very large metropolitan areas (typically 200-400 miles apart) that have major congestion issues and very high demand, for example the route between the Bay Area and Los Angeles (if it is sufficiently short).

However, says Fedea "in practice, [the implementing government] has tended to extend networks beyond what would have been reasonable, with precarious economic and social outcomes. ... the

Spanish case is especially extreme, constituting a pattern of misguided policy, since it has resulted in the high-speed network [that is] the largest in the world in relative terms ... with the lowest levels of demand of all countries ..."

California's current 500 mile plan is costed at \$68 billion, more than four times the cost per mile of Spain's network. The California cost of more than \$130 million per mile may not be unreasonable, given the geological uncertainties of the long tunnels through the Diablo Range and the Tehachapis, and the long stretches of elevated structure proposed through the very flat San Joaquin Valley.

However, if Spain's trains didn't pencil at one quarter California's costs, what does that say about the Golden State's prospects of profitable high speed rail?

SIMILAR ROUTE, WORSE DETAILS

California and adjacent parts of Nevada are somewhat smaller in area than Spain, with a population only 4 million smaller. The initial Bay Area-Los Angeles segment has more population per route mile than Madrid-Barcelona, but has a 30 percent longer and more expensive route to operate, about 500 miles vs. 386 miles for Madrid-Barcelona (coincidentally the LA-SF distance via Interstate 5.)

The California HSR line will have far more dismal economics than Spain if basic design and routing changes are not made, and it retains the 30 percent handicap in route mileage.

Unexpectedly high operating costs are what is killing the economics of European high speed rail. Failure to get a handle on these before the system design is set in concrete poses a major threat to California's existing intercity passenger rail program as well as regional rail and urban transit, due to the scale of costs.



With 1,562 miles already in service, Spain's AVE high speed rail network, world's second largest after China, is in financial free fall. More construction would worsen the picture.

I-5 Tejon Pass May Be the Only Politically Feasible HSR Alignment Into Los Angeles

Opinion by Michael D. Setty

In August 2014, Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael Antonovich asked the High Speed Rail Authority (HSRA) to consider a controversial new Eastern San Fernando Valley route. The currently preferred route runs parallel to State Highway 14 via Acton, Agua Dulce and Santa Clarita. Antonovich's alternative would go south from Palmdale, be largely in tunnel through the Angeles National Forest, then under Sunland-Tujunga and Shadow Hills, emerging in the eastern San Fernando Valley to reach Burbank.

Predictably, Antonovich's idea stirred up new opposition to HSR and placed citizens in each area at odds with one another. Santa Clarita, Acton and Agua Dulce residents are now demanding the eastern San Fernando Valley route. The latter communities want HSRA keep its original preferred routing parallel to Highway. 14.

On April 27, nearly 1,500 residents rallied at Santa Clarita's Canyon High School, while 2,000 residents from the eastern San Fernando Valley met to oppose HSR a few weeks earlier. Tensions have been high in the meetings, and many attendees have been outwardly hostile to the proposed arrival of a rail project that ostensibly will not serve local traffic at all.

The long-tunnel idea, which now has at least three variants, is not highly regarded by rail experts or geologists. Project insiders are among the most critical, and some claim that the meetings are only political theater, because the tunnels are not in fact feasible. Although cost issues have not been fully acknowledged by the HSRA, even if a tunnel could be feasibly built, adding even more miles of additional tunneling is expected to raise total project cost by many billions of dollars, making it even less likely that an operating high speed rail system will ever open.

Given the determined citizen opposition to both HSR routing options on the table thanks to their major negative impacts, a third option is essential: serious reconsideration of the Tejon Pass HSR alignment that parallels I-5 between the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California. The May-July 2013 California Rail News presented a detailed article about the Tejon Pass option.

While that article showed the HSR route alongside I-5 for its entire length through Santa Clarita (see map right), **the author recommends switching to the existing railroad right-of-way from Santa Clarita into Los Angeles via a 2 mile subway under Magic Mountain Blvd.** This routing would cut the capital cost and operating cost of the high speed rail project by shortening the route by at least 40 miles, add significant traffic, and facilitate an underground stop in central Valencia.

Best of all, it would refocus local improvements back on what area residents were originally promised last time they came out in force. These included upgrades to the existing Metrolink line between Palmdale, Santa Clarita, and San Fernando Valley, so that the local community receives service and benefit from the project.

Perhaps Supervisor Antonovich really believes in his tunnel idea. If he were to discover that project employees know that it is a fantasy and are trying to generate more engineering expenses, it would be a fitting denouement to the circus atmosphere created by HSRA.



Nearly 1,500 rally in Santa Clarita protesting proposed HSR route along Hwy 14. About 2,000 attended an anti-HSR rally in eastern San Fernando Valley.



Switzerland Leads European Rail in Traffic, Service Quality and Safety, Say Consultants

by Michael D. Setty

On May 4, the international management consulting firm Boston Consulting Group (BCG) released its analysis and ratings of 2014 performance by national railway systems in Europe. With no surprise to railway insiders, BCG found that the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB CFF FFS) had the highest overall ranking based on three factors, followed closely by Sweden, Denmark, France, Finland and Germany. The three factors evaluated by BCG were:

1. Intensity of Use. To what extent is rail transport used by passengers and freight companies? [What are the service frequencies?]
2. Quality of Service. Are the trains punctual and fast, and is rail travel affordable?
3. Safety. Does the railway system adhere to the highest safety standards?

While there were many other factors that could have been considered, BCG confined its analysis to the three above to develop an easy to understand and comprehensive indicator. According to BCG each factor had at least two subdimensions, but each overall factor was given equal weight in the analysis.

Freight and passenger volumes were considered under Intensity of Use. Punctuality of both regional and long distance trains, percentage of high-speed rail, and average fare per passenger kilometer were included under Quality of Service. Under Safety, accidents per train



SBB Trains at Zurich Hauptbahnhof
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kilometer and fatalities per train kilometer were considered.

BCG gave more weight to passenger service because in Europe, there is no reliable information available about freight rail performance. Similarly, larger countries such as Germany and France were favored over smaller ones such as Switzerland and Finland due to their significant provision of high-speed rail service.

Switzerland's SBB scored 7.1 points out of 8.0 total in the BCG rankings for 2014. SBB scored a perfect 3.0 in Intensity of Use, which is not surprising given its very high average frequency of service,

typically hourly on branch lines, and every 30 minutes or better on main line services. In contrast, SBB ranked a middling 5th in Quality of Service after Spain, France, Finland and Denmark (SBB's famed on-time performance may have declined recently). SBB scored a close third in Safety after Luxembourg and Denmark.

While all European railways receive government funding for both capital and operations, those with the highest BCG rankings generally also have the largest per capita investments, with Switzerland at the top of the list followed by Germany, France, Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands. These countries invest in infrastructure more than operating subsidies. While not noted by BCG, the Swiss focus their rail investments on reducing travel times to even intervals of 30, 60, 90 minutes, etc. between key transfer stations, facilitating reliable timed connections between rail routes repeating at consistent times past every hour. This increases patronage, leading to demand for more frequencies, eliminating most of the need for costly 125 mph+ infrastructure. This is perhaps an important lesson in making rail investments in California that quickly return real value to riders. Link: <http://www.bcgperspectives.com/>

President's Corner A TRIBUTE TO RICHARD TOLMACH

By Ronald Jones,
Interim TRAC President

Effective April 3, 2015, TRAC President and cofounder Richard Tolmach resigned from the Presidency and TRAC Board. TRAC. This was due to his new position as a consultant to a private passenger rail operator.

Richard Tolmach played a key role in creating the passenger rail network California has today. Rich began his rail career at age 26 as the first member of the Rail Transit Branch in Caltrans. He developed the schedules and marketing that made expanded San Diegan 403(b) Amtrak corridor service into a nationally-acclaimed success, tripling ridership by doubling its frequency between 1976 and 1979.

He also co-authored the policy paper and financial analysis that led to creation of the Amtrak California feeder bus network in 1980. For about a decade, starting in 1984, he was assigned to produce state rail timetables and develop new feeder bus routes.

In 1990, Rich worked independently on development and promotion of Proposition 116, resulting in \$2 billion of rail improvements throughout California, including the purchase of key rights-of-way that became the basis for Metrolink, Coaster and expansion of Caltrain service.

He has been in demand for myriad map, transit marketing and timetable projects, and following his retirement from Caltrans participated in planning activities for a European railroad.

In recognition of Richard Tolmach's four decades of work on rail passenger service in California, I hereby announce creation of TRAC's annual Rail Innovator Award, which will recognize the contribution of an individual or group to passenger rail.

OVERNIGHT TRAIN CUTBACKS CONTINUE ACROSS GERMANY

Germany's national rail operator Deutsche Bahn (DB) has killed several night trains within Germany in the recent past, to and from Germany, as well as through Germany:

- Copenhagen to Amsterdam with sections to Basel and Prague
- Paris to Berlin with sections to Hamburg and Munich

and in December 2015, DB plans to end Berlin-Munich night service.

In Germany, DB originally claimed that the night trains had lost passengers. However, this was contradicted by DB employees working on the night trains, who proved this was incorrect. With the help of opposition members of the German Bundestag (parliament), environmentalists and rail advocacy groups (TRAC's German counterparts), opponents of DB's proposed "train-offs" obtained a hearing in the German Bundestag's transport committee on January 14th, 2015.

DB had to admit to German legislators that their claims about the night trains were untrue; patronage is actually high and available capacity is well-utilized.

DB claims that night train economics are poor, but rail activists point out it is DB is hardly transparent in such matters and it is DB that makes up those financial figures. DB agreed to set up workshops with environmental and rail advocates thanks to extensive public pressure. DB is also plan-

ning to design and purchase new coaches, which should better meet the needs of passengers (sleeping facilities, restaurant, wireless Internet, etc.)

European rail advocates also point out that working with the railway trade unions is also essential in advocating for retaining trains. In Germany, activists have noted that the chairperson of the German Bundestag's transport committee is a member of the presidency of the railway employees' union; some union members also sit on the supervisory board of DB.

Rail advocates in Europe assert that the recent trend of discontinuing night trains has "disconnected" Europe. As one key activist put it, the "train chain" throughout Europe is being destroyed by uncoordinated timetables.

The problem is larger than just trains and larger than just overnight schedules. As rail's viability is undermined by service curtailment, traffic on even strong corridors fall off because connections are gone. Bus operators actively exploit the gaps and get footholds where service was previously uneconomic for them.

Many of the most destructive changes are initiated by misguided rail planning staff who believe they are streamlining corridor service and don't understand the importance of longer-distance traffic to the overall network.

ACEforward: ACE's Visionary Plans to Extend the Altamont Corridor

by Michael D. Setty
and David Schonbrunn

San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission Manager of Regional Initiatives Dan Leavitt explained his latest project at TRAC's annual meeting held at the California Railroad Museum in Old Sacramento on January 17, 2015. He presented ACEforward, an ambitious plan to expand the Altamont Commuter Express service beyond the current corridor further into the San Joaquin Valley by the early 2020's.

ACE currently operates four weekday round trip peak period commuter trains on an 86-mile route with stops at Stockton, Lathrop, Tracy, Livermore, Pleasanton, Fremont, Santa Clara and San Jose. ACE service parallels I-580 over the Altamont Pass between the San Joaquin Valley and the Tri-Valley.

The route then turns south paralleling I-680 between Pleasanton and Fremont, and parallel to I-880 from Fremont into Santa Clara and downtown San Jose.

In 2014, ACE ridership exceeded 1.2 million passengers, and is projected to grow to 1.33 million annual riders in 2015, or more than 5,000 daily passengers. ACE currently serves about 600 passengers per train, not far behind Chicago's Metra commuter rail in Chicago and matching Caltrain. This is despite the fact that ACE does not serve a concentration of employment such as downtown San Francisco.

An extensive network of shuttle buses connects the Great America station to Silicon Valley's widely dispersed employment sites, explaining ACE's very high ridership per train.

By 2018 ACEforward would expand service from four to six daily round trips plus provide incremental safety and operational improvements. New stations are proposed in downtown Tracy and in Lathrop at the proposed River Islands development.

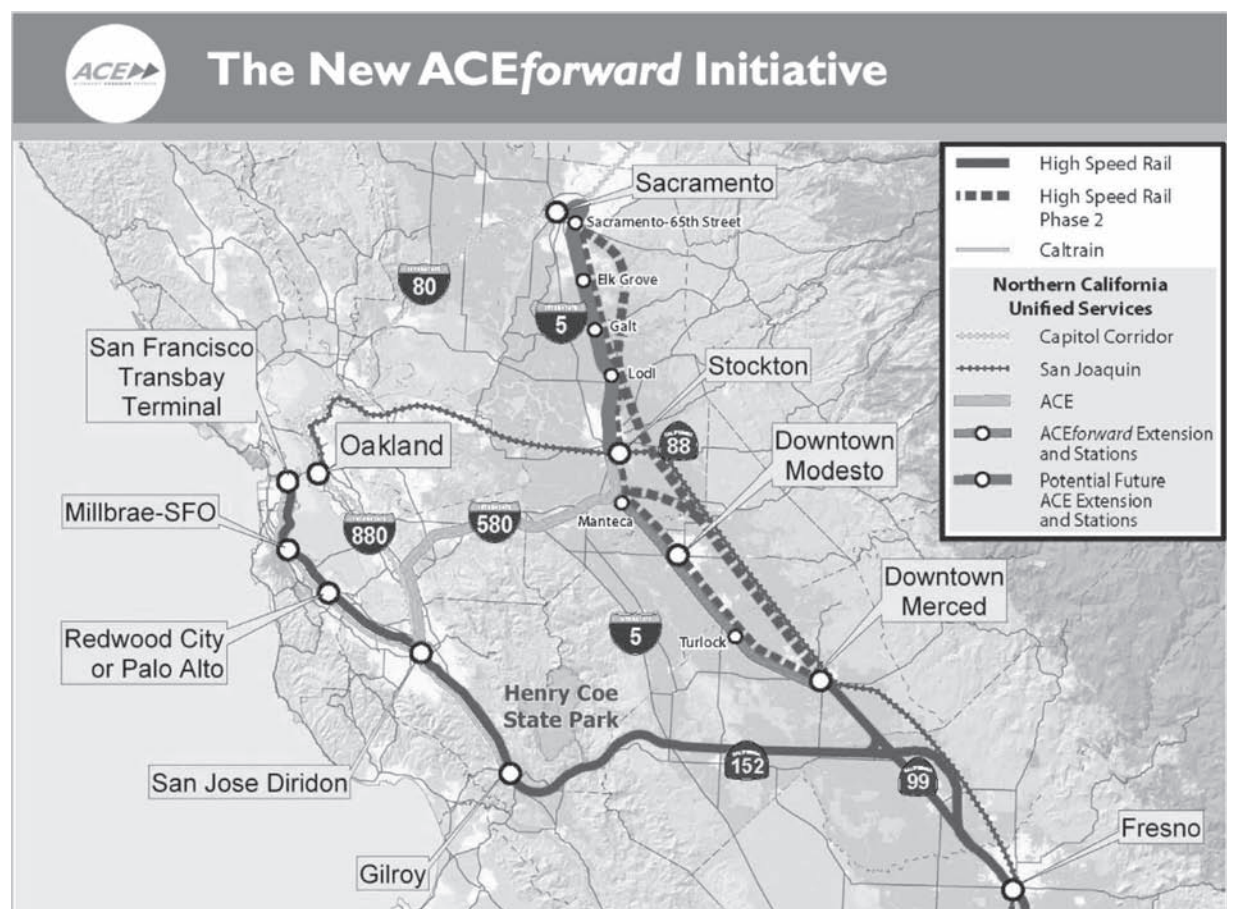
The centerpiece of ACEforward is extending ACE service on a new exclusive passenger track to downtown Modesto along Union Pacific's Fresno Subdivision, including new stations in Manteca and possibly Ripon.

The plan also envisions an additional extension via exclusive passenger tracks between Modesto and Merced, including stations in downtown Turlock and Livingston or Atwater.

By 2025 with expansion to ten daily round trips (six to/from Stockton and four to Modesto and Merced), overall ACE ridership could exceed 4 million annual riders including the existing route and extensions. Ironically, no midday service on the existing ACE route was mentioned in the ACEforward presentation.

When service beyond weekday peak periods would be added including weekend service, the ACEforward plan projects up to 5.9 million riders by 2025. Between 345,000 and 675,000 annual riders are projected for a potential high speed rail connection in Merced. A BART connection at Greenville Road in east Livermore would theoretically add 865,000 annual trips, while weekend service might add between 610,000 and 950,000 riders.

ACEforward's projected capital costs are about \$1.1 billion (2014 dollars) for the entire expansion program, mainly for the Modesto and Merced extensions. The



24-mile extension to downtown Modesto is projected to cost \$350 million (2014 dollars) including exclusive passenger tracks, the corridor's share of expanding the capacity in the existing ACE corridor, maintenance facility expansion and rolling stock. The Modesto-to-Merced extension is projected to cost \$470 million. Extending ACE service between Stockton and Sacramento is a potential project after ACEforward completion.

TRAC has concerns about the viability and priorities of the proposed project: It would require a significant funding commitment from Stanislaus and Merced Counties, yet it is doubtful if voter approval

The San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission deserves major credit for its efforts to improve regional rail service. However, TRAC believes ACE needs a plan focusing on projects that maximize ridership potential such as major upgrades to the current route and reviving the Dumbarton Corridor.

could be obtained for a local match for federal capital funds, as well as large ongoing operations and maintenance needs. \$800 million or more for exclusive passenger tracks is excessive for only four round trip trains per day between Lathrop, Modesto and Merced.

Funding of that magnitude could be better used to upgrade the existing ACE corridor, which also has considerably more patronage potential than current ACE ridership, and much more than the proposed Modesto-Merced extension.

The San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission deserves major credit for its efforts to improve regional rail service. However, ACE needs a plan focusing on

projects that maximize ridership potential such as major upgrades to the current route and reviving the Dumbarton corridor.

TRAC believes that ACE's number one priority should be a significantly faster exclusive passenger route between Stockton and Fremont. A large reduction in travel time would do far more for ridership than the proposed extensions. ACE should share the route with San Joaquin Corridor trains serving the East Bay. This would be a very competitive project for cap and trade intercity rail capital funding.

In the longer run should the existing California high speed rail plan fail as TRAC expects, an Altamont routing upgraded to 150+ mph standards would facilitate very fast high speed rail service along I-5 corridor between Tracy and the northern foot of Tejon Pass (e.g., Grapevine), enabling travel times of three hours or less between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

A second priority should be rebuilding rail across the Dumbarton Strait to connect ACE and the San Joaquins to San Francisco and San Mateo County. This was omitted from ACEforward even though Alameda County successfully passed a transportation sales tax in November 2014, which included funding for Dumbarton Corridor improvements.

However, ACEforward does not mention using an upgraded Dumbarton rail line. Altamont would also bring through HSR train service to the East Bay, to San Francisco via the Dumbarton corridor, and branch off to San Jose at Fremont with little time penalty compared to the current high-speed rail plan.

New rail service via Altamont would address a pressing Bay Area need to remove a significant portion of increasing ridership pressure on BART's Transbay Tube, particularly for trips originating in eastern and southern Alameda County. BART is studying construction of a second Transbay Tube, but implementation of that option is decades away at best.

This could also gain political support from Alameda County and Silicon Valley employers who are planning major new facilities in Fremont, Menlo Park and Redwood City.

CARRD RESEARCHER: THERE WAS NEVER A REAL STUDY OF I-5

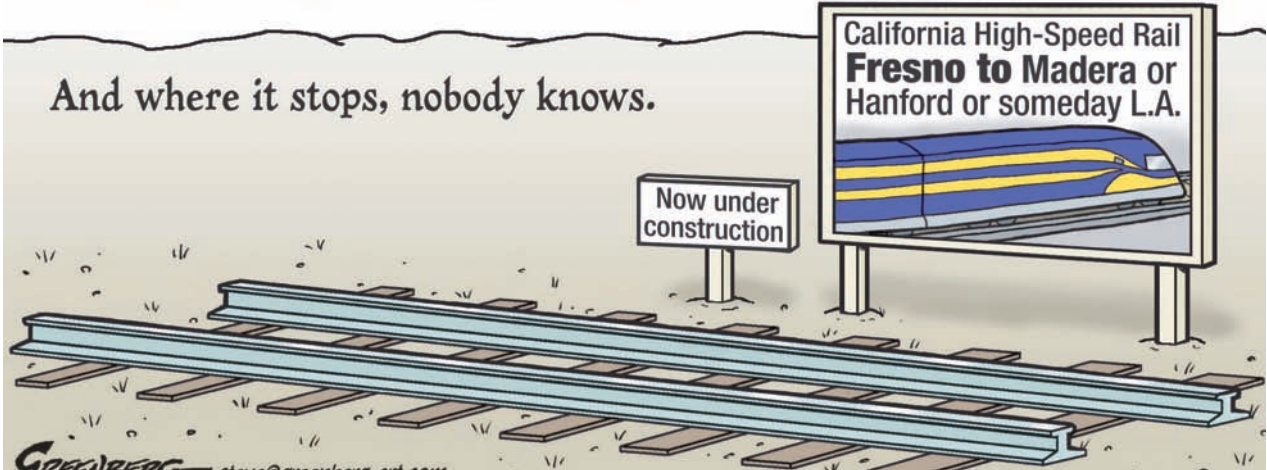
At TRAC's Annual Meeting held on Saturday, January 17, 2015 at the California Railroad Museum in Old Sacramento, a prominent high-speed rail researcher revealed that the State of California has never studied the option of routing high-speed rail along the Interstate 5 corridor between Southern California, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Sacramento.

TRAC has long thought that an I-5 alignment would offer shorter travel times than the current HSR plan, with much lower costs per mile that may make private sector investment and operation profitable.

Rita Wespi, a co-founder of Californians Advocating Responsible Rail Design (CARRD), revealed that, in all of the exhaustive research that she's conducted into California high-speed rail in Caltrans and California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) archives, she has found no evidence that the I-5 HSR alignment option was ever studied.

The only mention of the I-5 option that she could find was in an early study that stated that the I-5 alignment had been rejected as an alternative for further study. This omission illustrates how politicized CHSRA's work has been from the beginning.

As noted in the article on page 4, this situation also represents a major financial threat to California's existing



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passenger rail program, and perhaps regional rail and urban transit as well.

It underscores TRAC's recommendations to abandon the current, fatally-flawed HSR plan, and to empower a California Rail Commission to allocate rail funding with board representatives from the various rail agencies.

A Rail Commission would be the logical state agency to replace CHSRA. It could conduct a fair process allowing for the private sector to submit alternative HSR proposals, offering the I-5 alignment and other route options as as more cost-effective approaches.

SUPPORTING RAIL REFORM IS TAX-DEDUCTIBLE



The California Rail Foundation was founded in 1987 to promote modern rail and bus technology, including high-speed rail. Since that time we have produced *California Rail News* and cosponsored an annual conference that educates on rail, Cal Rail 2020.

We never believed it would be easy to build California high-speed rail, but we underestimated just how much fraud megaprojects apparently attract. The project now has a broken budget because of tens of billions of pork including 200 miles of wasted route and dozens of miles of unneeded viaducts planned in the Central Valley.

It appears to be the same model used on Peninsula and Los Angeles County segments. Taxpayers are being offered only overly expensive choices by HSRA that wreck cities the same way that elevated highways would.

It does no good to just complain about fraud; we have to organize and fight it in court.

In July 2008, CRF filed suit in Sacramento Superior Court, along with the Planning and Conservation League, TRANSDEF, the Town of Atherton and the City of Menlo Park to overturn adoption of the Pacheco Alternative which would have destroyed many Peninsula cities.

We won the case in October 2009. HSRA was forced to rescind its selection of Pacheco and redo its environmental work. A brief opportunity in 2010 allowed us to submit new comments into the record. We retained a leading model expert, Norm Marshall of Smart Mobility, who found major flaws in HSRA's ridership figures, confirmed by other experts.

We also retained the leading European HSR route design firm, Setec Ferroviaire, to help us define and present a faster and better way for trains to link S.F., Sacramento and Los Angeles, through the East Bay. You can see Setec's work and other new feature articles at the CRF site:

calrailfoundation.org

At the same time, CRF has continued to support parallel legal efforts that have paid off with a high probability HSRA will have to either obey the Prop. 1A language compelling an operable route for its first construction segment, or drop the entire project. CRF is actively providing leadership on reforming the project, and promoting cost savings available by involving private capital. Your generous contribution today to CRF will help us stop the bad plan and launch an environmentally superior alternative.

We are a tax-deductible 501(c)[3] nonprofit, and operate without paid officers or permanent employees, so all financial resources are directed to our mission of cost-effective modern rail service. Take a tax deduction by using the form on Page 2 to send a check to CRF or by using the PayPal link on our web page.