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 (continued on Page Two)
We are pleased to have John Weis of the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) present to discuss how he is working with European cities and their transit systems to improve them. He has been utilizing many of the ideas that will be presented in SPUR's report on the region's transit system. We look forward to hearing his perspective on the issue.


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"Seamless Transit" (continued from Page One)

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 details 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 BART station in Larkspur. 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 cohesive 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 the lead of the 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 services and to develop the 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.

Transfers remain a significant challenge 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 over-crowding) 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.

The report 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, 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.sfur.org/publications/spur-report/2015-03-31/seamless-transit

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Michael Setty, TRAC Admin. Director
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California Rail News April-July 2015
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 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 the solution is reducing motor vehicle use. For the first time, Caltrans has acknowledged that reducing GHGs will require reducing Vehicle Miles Traveled (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. To that end, enhanced 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 drivers 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 likely encounter resistance and backlash.

Transportation leaders will need to shift their focus to improving mobility without increasing VMT. Recycling 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 transportation leaders will need to shift their focus to planning for development that does not increase VMT.

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 continued expansion, the solo-driven-based system will inevitably descend into gridlock. Climate change and congestion have finally forced the 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 State’s GHG reduction goal. It identified the 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, to do this, 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.

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 weaken the GHG reduction goal. It identified the “turning points” where gas taxes or sales taxes are reduced as road pricing is implemented. To ensure that drivers in urban areas have a reasonable choice, road pricing should be phased in an 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.
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. Tömlach
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 offset by average savings in airline fares or value of time previously spent driving.

Fedea, a free market-oriented Spanish think tank, found by three AVE routes cover direct operating expenses, and none come close to the level needed to cover direct operating expenses and none come close to the level needed to cover direct operating expenses.

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.

RIDER 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 services.

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 by the central government, has tended to behave like a private company.

The political and social context apparently has been to cause 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 trains are generally ridden by richer Partido Popular users.

Popular users, while lower income users take the more affordable conventional services with fewer passengers.

A second independent investigation is reportedly being carried out for the French government, which has concerns about the lines it uses for its through 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 shorthanded).

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. Continuing 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 $120 billion per mile may not be unreasonable, given the geographical uncertainties of the long tunnels through the Diablo Range and the Tehachapi, and the long stretches of elevated structure proposed through the very flat San Joaquin Valley.

With a 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.

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 is 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 concreteposes a major threat to California’s SF-Sacramento passenger rail program as well as regional rail and urban transit, due to the scale of costs.
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.

Map by Clem Tillier
The three factors evaluated by BCG were:

1. Intensity of Use. To what extent is freight and passenger volumes considered under Intensity of Use. Punctuality of both regional and long distance trains, percentage of high-speed rail, and available capacity is well-utilized.

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 available capacity is well-utilized.

Germany's national rail operator, Deutsche Bahn (DB), has killed several night trains within Germany in the recent past, 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 a group of specialist issues in many 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 planning 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 is initiated by misguided rail planning. Many of the most destructive changes are initiated by misguided rail planning, 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 will really 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 co-founder Richard Tolmach resigned from the Presidency and TRAC Board. TRAC, the Intermodal Transportation Advocacy Coalition, facilitated as a consultant to a private passenger rail operator.

Richard Tolmach played a key role in creating the passenger railroad in California that he describes in this article. 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 the San Diegan the first successful California intercity rail service into a nationally-acclaimed corridor service and don't understand the "train chain".

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

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 service.
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-880 over the Altamont Pass between the San Joaquin Valley and the Tri-Valley.

The route then turns south paralleling I-880 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 passangers. ACE currently serves about 600 passengers per train, not far behind Chicago’s Metra per train, not far behind Chicago’s Metra or more than 5,000 daily passengers. ACE service parallels I-880 over the Altamont Pass between the San Joaquin Valley and the Tri-Valley.

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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.

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.

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.

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 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 high speed rail trains serving the East Bay. This would be a very competitive project for cap and trade interset 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 Joaquin 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.
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 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 more cost-effective approaches.