California recently lost major pioneers in rail passenger service advocacy. Doras Briggs and Jane Tolmach.

DORAS BRIGGS & JANE TOLMACH: PIONEERS OF RAIL ADVOCACY

By Shelli Andranagian

Handford, California – The current train travel in serious business for a group of dedicated and selfless individuals who have met in a rural American town nearly every month since June 2011.

Based in Kings County, Citizens for California High Speed Rail Accountability (CCHSRA) has been on the frontlines in building the California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) accountable. CCHSRA’s co-chairmen Aaron Fukuda, a civil engineer and Frank Chiens, a farmer, private attorney and former parole agent, first met in May 2011. Both men, who were born and raised in rural Handford and discovered by accident that their properties would be dispossessed by the Authority, were immediately bonded, after sharing their early similar stories of conversations and breakdowns with CHSRA.

Fukuda and Chiens decided to form an accountability group shortly thereafter to assist others in getting answers and the necessary help. “We realized we were both being lied to and decided to do something about it,” Oliveira said. “Over time, CCHSRA has become a family unit. We continue to have each other’s back.”

The group has been in the forefront and on the frontlines ever since, all while attempting to get CHSRA and its board to be in full compliance with Proposition 1A (aka the Safe); Reliable High-Speed Train Bond Act for the 21st Century which California voters narrowly passed in November 2008.

CCHSRA’s members include people in agriculture, business, education, engineering, health care, law and the media, along with retired professionals. Many share a frontline for trains, but not for how the Authority carries them. They are acutely aware of the mismangement of the proposed rail project and have pledged their support to our cause,” said Fukuda.

In addition to attending weekly meetings, CCHSRA members traverse the Central Valley and California each month. Activities include meeting informative workshops for those impacted and testifying about their concerns at CHSRA Board meetings, as well as meetings of the County Board of Supervisors, City Councils and the State Public Works Board.

CCHSRA members write letters to legislators and testify at legislative hearings, supporting rail advocates like TRAC.

Members stay up-to-date on what is happening in each proposed segment (often happening in each proposed segment in ways that tend to repeat itself but not in a good way). This then leads to legislative hearings, supporting rail advocates like TRAC.

Fukuda stated, “When you see what they are doing in the public realm, it causes you concern. When you learn what they are doing behind closed doors, it angers you and compels you to action.”

On November 14, 2011, Kings County Judge Fukuda and farmer John Fowlkes filed suit against the CHSRA, asserting its project failed to comply with Proposition 1A. Phase 1 of the case resulted in an initial Superior Court victory on November 25, 2013. The Third District Appellate Court ruled on July 30, 2014 that sadly, plaintiffs had no remedy for the non-compliance found by the lower court.

However, the Court acknowledged that CHSRA needed to submit a funding plan to the Merced-Bakersfield route if it wanted construction funding from the Bond measure. The plaintiffs appealed the overturned ruling to the State Supreme Court, which decided to hear the case in a statement issued on October 15, 2014. Phase 2 of the Proposition 1A case is set for trial on February 11, 2016 in Sacramento.

Please visit www.cchsra.org for additional information.

CURRENT HIGH-SPEED PLAN ATTRACTS "INTEREST" BUT NO MONEY

By Michael D. Setty

TRAC Administrative Director

On June 22, 2015, the California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) released its Request for Expressions of Interest for the Development of a Preliminary Operating Segment. “We need to be very, very careful,” said Fukuda.

“Once Doras retired from UC Berkeley, she moved in a rural American town nearly every month since June 2011. CCHSRA solicitation drew 36 responses from large international construction, management, engineering and financial firms possessing varying degrees of HSRR experience and expertise. “They are not bringing their checkbook yet, but they are bringing their ideas, their interest, their commitment to work with us,” said TRAC co-founder Richard Tolmach, Jane Tolmach’s son and long-time rail advocate. Without Jane, there would be no TRAC.

As a member of the Southern California Association of Governments Transportation Committee, she advocated for commuter trains, and worked with 10th District Congressional Member Carl H. Levin to try to ensure Oxnard was included on the map. Her passing in 2013 was a huge blow to rail advocates. Jane was also a long-time member of TRAC, and often used her political influence to improve transit and passenger rail. She will be sorely missed.

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In the meanwhile, CHSRA will start the course in holding the Authority accountable when the time comes to fund the train travel in California.
Coast Observations

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMA) recently held a public hearing for Proposition K, a measure that would increase sales taxes on goods and services to $2.7 billion per year, meaning that it is set to expire in 2020.

The proposed measure would be used to fund the construction of the new Los Angeles County rail line, known as the South Bay Metrolink Expansion Project, which would expand the existing Metrolink system to connect the coastal cities of Santa Monica, Long Beach, and Torrance with the rest of the county.

However, some critics argue that the proposed measure is not necessary, as the existing Metrolink system already serves these areas. They argue that the funds could be better used to improve existing services rather than creating a new line.

Another issue is the cost of the proposed measure, which is projected to be $3.4 billion. Critics argue that this is too high, and that the measure should be re-evaluated before it is passed.

Despite these concerns, the measure is likely to pass, as the LACMA has been very successful in communicating the need for additional funding for the Metrolink system.

The line is expected to be open by 2022, and would be the first new rail line in Los Angeles County in over 50 years.

The New L.A. Co. Sales Tax Could Raise $2.7 Billion

5 New Rail Lines, No Metrolink Fix?

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HIGH SPEED RAIL: A WALK UNDER & THROUGH THE ANGELES NATIONAL FOREST?

CURRENT RAIL LINE UPGRADES MUST BE TORN OUT IF HSR ROUTED THAT WAY: NEW TUNNELS UNDER NATIONAL FOREST TO PLACATE SANTA CLARITA?

by Susan MacAdams
TRAC Board Member

With the passage of Proposition 1A, California voters agreed that the California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) would use existing rail corridors for the construction of the high-speed rail line. In Los Angeles, the Metrolink Antelope Valley Line is the designated rail corridor through which the San Fernando Valley for High-Speed Rail (HSR). It starts in Palmdale, goes through the desert alongside I-5, and ends at Los Angeles Union Station.

Currently, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) and Metrolink are spending tens of millions of dollars on construction projects along this corridor through the San Fernando Valley and Burbank. Metrolink has built twelve miles of bikeways along the Metrolink corridor in San Fernando Valley to Caltrans is currently constructing a mile-long Metrolink rail bridge in Burbank along this corridor. CHSRA has spent $55 million dollars on Prop. 1A funding to rebuild fifteen new at-grade crossings, three plazas, three bridges and ten miles of track between Burbank and Sylmar along the Antelope Valley Line. Why is this news? Because these improvements will have to be torn out and replaced if HSR is built within the railroad corridor. This project will be the first in America to build a high-speed rail line in an existing rail corridor.

FATAL FLAWS OF TUNNELS UNDER NATIONAL FOREST

The Los Angeles Times reported on October 25 that CHSRA “has discovered larger difficulties than it has publicly disclosed: the earthquake faults and difficult geology northeast of Los Angeles will make tunnels extremely challenging to build. They will significantly increase costs and delay completion of the project—if they can ever be completed. A tunnelling expert that consulted on the 32-mile long Gotthard Base Tunnel under the Swiss Alps called the CHSRA’s tunnels “very, very ambitious—to put it mildly.”

TRAC’s Susan MacAdams has uncovered a dramatic twist to this story: tunnels under the Angeles National Forest can’t be built at all. The tunnelling contractor, a member of The Elite Group, has actually launched a legal challenge against the project for violating the National Forest Act by tunneling into an area that is not considered an “emergence escape location” (EEL) and is not part of the Angeles National Forest. This is one of the fatal flaws of CHSRA’s tunneling concept.

The FER will not allow construction of the long tunnels because of the potential for terrorist bombings. The ends of the tunnels become like canyons, shooting the explosive blasts into an underground Burbank HSR station. That means the E1, E2 and E3 Burbank HSR tunnel designs are not feasible.

Contrary to the direction given by Proposition 1A, Tunnels E1, E2 and E3 do not follow an existing transportation corridor. Following a high-voltage transmission corridor does not create an acceptable alternative, because high-voltage transmission lines create unstable mountainous terrain in zigzag patterns rather than maintain a steady grade.

The tunnels would cost much more than the State Highway 14 corridor. The tunnels themselves would be feasible, the damage and destruction caused by the mining operations and tunnel staging areas would be beyond what any local neighborhood would tolerate. Tunneling excavation pits are the size of a high school football stadium, but much deeper.

High-speed trains would need emergency escape routes, but they can’t be built where the tunnel is 2000 feet below the surface. Even where the depth is not so great, emergency evacuation routes can’t exist in the face of the uncertain dangers about the emergency escape routes and the Angeles National Forest.

in the National Forest.

To construct tunnel E1, the Atwater neighborhood bordered on the south by Santa Fe railroad and Glencoe on the north, and Patton and Pierce will have many homes condemned. This includes the closing or shortening of the Whitney Airport runway for the tunnel portal location. This neighborhood appears to be the hardest hit as the entire distance between the tunnel portal and the tunneling pits would be excavated and remain an open trench.

To construct tunnel E2, the Sun Valley Burbank neighborhood bordered on the south by San Fernando Boulevard and on the north by the I-5 freeway. Ledge and Ferraro, including Glencoe Elementary School, would be condemned to make room for the pit needed for the tunneling machine. To construct tunnel E3, the Sun Valley neighborhood above North Glencoe Boulevard along Gleencrest, Rulledge, Sangamon, Milano and Hollywood Way would be condemned for the tunneling pit. Other streets would be closed, leaving remaining residents to face long detours, dust, debris and noise for up to ten years.

The proposed Burbank HSR station adjacent to the Bob Hope Burbank Airport is the entrance to the tunnels. If the station can’t be built, then the tunnels can’t be built. The station would be the size of the World Trade Center, built on its side. Building such a massive structure in soil with known toxic contamination, would be environmentally challenging. There is no building of that size in the Western United States. The infrastructure around Burbank Airport cannot support massive HSR stations. CHSRA has not conducted an environmental review for a HSR station.

To construct tunnels E2 and E3, the Sun Valley Burbank neighborhood bordered on the south by Sun Valley Boulevard and on the north by the I-5 freeway. Ledge and Ferraro, including Glencoe Elementary School, would be condemned for the tunneling machine. To construct tunnel E3, the Sun Valley neighborhood above North Glencoe Boulevard would not be centrally located for Santa Fe railroad and Glencoe on the north, and Patton and Pierce will have many homes condemned. This includes the closing or shortening of the Whitney Airport runway for the tunnel portal location. This neighborhood appears to be the hardest hit as the entire distance between the tunnel portal and the tunneling pits would be excavated and remain an open trench.

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Sacramento RT Struggles to Improve LRT & Bus Expansion to 2016 Kings Arena Opening

By Michael D. Setty

In recent years, Sacramento’s Regional Transit (RT) has come under scrutiny regarding service quality, the cleanliness of its light rail trains and buses, and growing concerns about security on its facilities. Furthermore, RT has been under pressure from the downtown Sacramento business community to provide a more reliable, particularly the light rail network, cleaner, safer and more punctual service to the downtown core prior to the opening of the Kings arena.

RT has signed agreements with local business groups to support to expand service to the Kings arena. This is particularly important to handling the crowds from the new Golden 1 Center arena prior to its opening in October 2016.

The agreement includes expanding the use of work crews to clean downtown 10 LRT platforms and 26 bus stops. RT has also made similar arrangements with Northern California and Southern business groups.

RT is also looking at ways of increasing downtown LRT station capacity prior to the arena opening. The current station was the entire removal of the 7th & K street and constructing a replacement stop about one block north of the 7th & J St. RT suggests new platforms with boarding on both sides of trains after arena events. The current 7th & K St. station is located on a steep hill, which leads to accessibility and safety issues, and occasional overcrowding.

Additional upgrades are suggested for the 20th & J St. platform.

A two-car train of Sacramento’s original 1976 26-car fleet of Siemens LRVs. Planning for replacing these nearly 30-year old vehicles needs to begin soon.

In response to plans to relocate the 7th & K light rail station to handle Golden 1 Center (coliseum) crowds, I suggested keeping the station at 7th & K but with some major modifications.

First, redesign the station and install safer 8-car platforms both on the north and south sides, respectively. The station should also allow for controlled entry and egress.

Second, utilize the Rose of Lima Plaza as a staging area to transport 2,000-3,000 people at one time. Depending on the schedule of that evening or weekend trains are lined up. The station should also allow for controlled entry and egress.

Now that RT General Manager Mike Wold has announced that the future direction of transit expansion and improvements is not clear.

Plans for a Downtown-West Sacramento station are among several projects that would add over 300,000 people at one station and are also vital to LRT expansions.

The streetcar is also in the process of relocating downtown LRT to the K Street stop and constructing a replacement stop about one block north of the K Street stop. The current K Street station serves the Kings arena.

In some cases, the current station has been recommended for conversion to a bus stop, which was downsized and moved to Union Street.

The new K Street station will be very important to the Kings arena.

The station will also be part of the Kings arena.

Sacramento RT LRT & BUS EXPANSION DEPENDS ON 2016 SALES TAX

By Michael D. Setty

The Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) authority has made progress towards its planned kickoff of commuter rail service between Santa Rosa, Petaluma, and San Rafael.

In June SMART succeeded with its $11 million request for state funding to purchase three additional self-propelled diesel multiple units (DMUs). These cars will supplement the SMART express fleet of 14-car fleet, which will now consist of four SMART express trains and one local SMART train with a capacity of 320 seated and 40 standing passengers. The trains accommodate up to 450 people.

The added rolling stock will provide additional capacity so SMART can extend service to the Sonoma County Airport and the SF Highway 101 corridor.

The $39 million needed for the Western extension is expected to be funded by the Federal政府.

In August, SMART finished the installation of a new two-level station for a railroad that was installed 30 years ago near Galena, Texas, but no longer needed there. The recycled bridge replaced the 1904 vintage Hagstrom Bridge over the Petaluma River, which was probably saving at least $20 million in the process. In early October, SMART operated its first test train over the new bridge.

The project’s structure includes a drainage bridge, which uses counterweights to lift the rail bed above the water when operating. SMART expects the new bridge to last at least 50 years.

On October 7th, the Novato City Council approved a $100,000 study of constructing a third SMART station at the site of the old downtown Novato Northwestern Pacific station. Other stations include a site in Novato near the Fireman’s Fund complex, and near Hamilton Field.

In SMART’s final report, the council members approving the study felt that a Downtown Novato station would support the city’s revitalization goals. Strengthening downtown as a destination and an attraction for visitors. One concern in the hearing feared that a “heavy flow of commuters” (never mind that the downtown station would disrupt the area’s “small town charm”) (never mind that the downtown station would disrupt the area’s “small town charm”)

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