



I'm David Schonbrunn, TRAC's Vice President for Policy. This all started with my participation in the Highway 37 Policy Committee, which wants to build a multibillion dollar widened highway across protected wetlands. Building more lanes will trap more people in driving, adding to the greenhouse gas emissions. I'm an environmentalist working to reduce the levels of GHG emissions from transportation, so that project concept was a non-starter for me.

TRAC wanted to create a viable transit alternative to give options to commuters that would otherwise be stuck in Highway 37 traffic. That way, we could protect the environment and start building a greener future. We propose to put passenger service on the existing rail line that parallels Highway 37. We call it the East-West train.

SMART – A High-Cost Project



We see the Highway 37 corridor as having different needs than the SMART corridor. That's why the project we're proposing is not a simple extension of SMART. I worked for nearly 30 years to bring passenger service back to the historic NWP corridor in Marin and Sonoma counties.

I believe SMART cost far more than was necessary, due to high-cost design decisions. Public rail projects typically cost too much because the business is driven by consultants whose fees are based on the size of the project. It is in their interest to have the public spend as much as possible. We've come up with a much less expensive project.

TRAC's Proposal – A Low-Cost Project



The Highway 37 corridor needs to prove itself as a transit corridor. We need to get past the many that claim the North Bay has too low a density for transit. For this reason, we've adopted a strategy of "build it as cheaply as possible, as quickly as possible, to get service into operation now." We firmly believe there's a demand out there—but we need to prove it.

This line is in freight use now, so we know passenger service can work technically. To keep capital costs way down, we propose to make use of the existing jointed rail and the existing roadbed. The major expense we foresee is replacing some ties to enable the trains to be cleared for 60 mph operation. Tracks and roadbed can easily be improved later, after ridership has grown enough to warrant a larger investment.

SMART's ADA Solution



SMART's high-platforms are a vestige of the history of the Northeast Corridor. They are very expensive to build, and quite ugly in urban settings. While they do provide level boarding to comply with ADA, TRAC believes they do not belong in California.

TRAC's ADA Solution



Low platforms are much cheaper to build, and are inconspicuous. We propose the train would terminate on the Capitol Corridor, which uses low platforms, like the other California intercity services. The platform is on the far right of this photo.

Dealing with ADA is much cheaper too. This is called a mini-high platform. It provides level boarding for wheelchair users, moms with strollers and bicyclists. The one pictured gives access to the first door of the train. Some stations could have more than one of these mini-highs.

Low-Floor DMUs

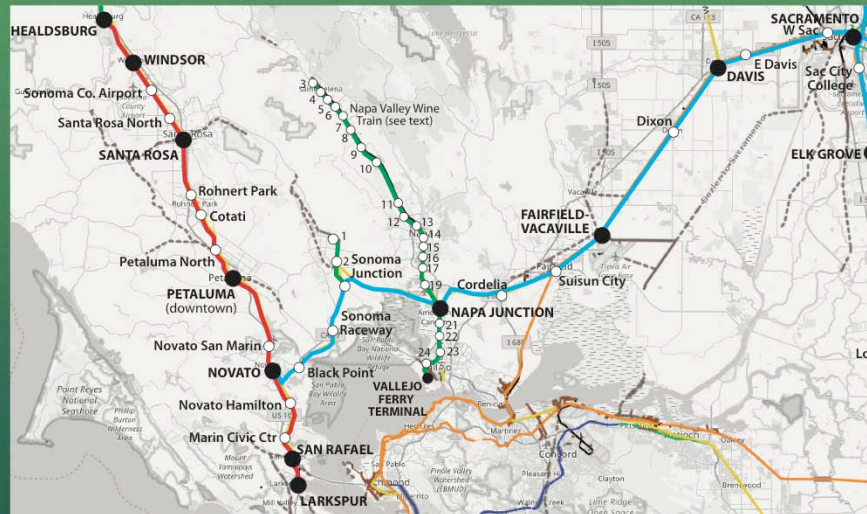
Much less expensive to operate



Low-floor cars are the leading trend in Europe now. That is where the future of railcars seems to be heading. TRAC sees the regulatory environment changing to enable 24 inch platforms to be built next to rail lines. Note the platform in the photo. Right now, that's not allowed in California on lines that carry freight. Regulations are still in place to protect brakemen from hitting a trackside obstacle like a platform. Until regulators wake up to the fact that there aren't brakemen anymore in these settings, the existing 8" low platforms will remain adequate. Access to these cars is only one step up.

These low-floor DMUs are much lighter than the cars SMART bought. That makes them significantly less expensive to operate, which makes a very big difference on a rail line that has no identified revenue source. These cars are FRA-certified to operate on tracks alongside freight trains. They are designed with Crash Energy Management — a crumple zone that absorb crash energy. This enables the car to be much lighter than the brute strength American approach to safety, which is now pretty obsolete.

TRAC's East-West Proposal



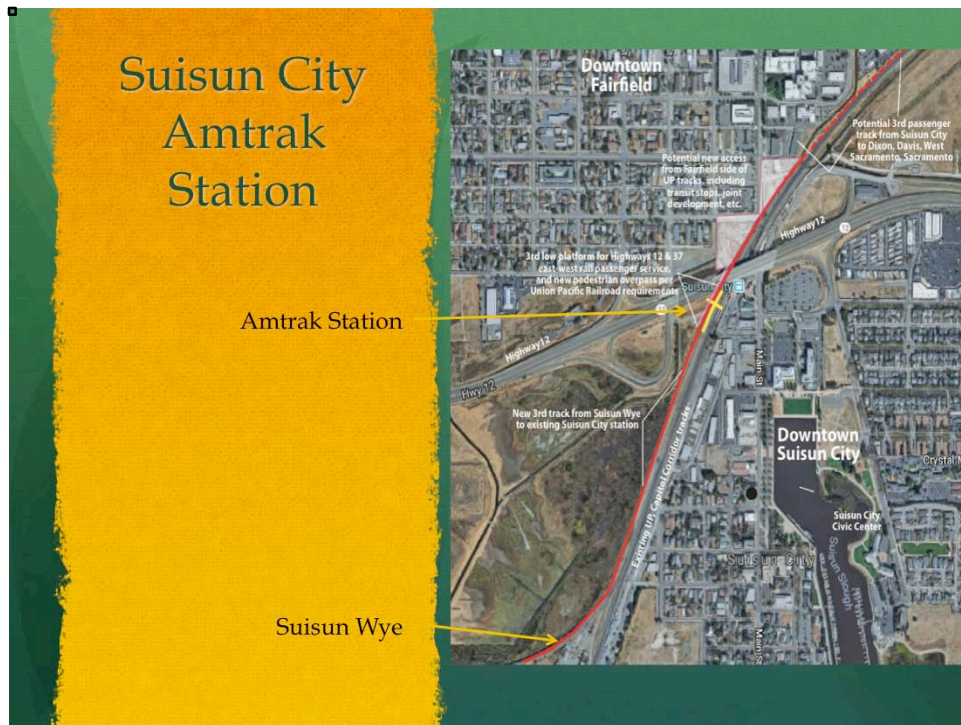
This map is in the current issue of California Rail News, along with a full description of the proposal. In the first phase of our proposal, the train would start in Novato and terminate at the Suisun City Amtrak station. This is where the NWP line from Marin connects to the Capitol Corridor, which goes from San Jose to Sacramento.

At some point in the future, we see gaining access to the UP track to Sacramento. This may take some additional capital investments. Extending this train to Sacramento makes much more sense than a concept currently under consideration, namely building a new light rail line from Sacramento from Davis. In our proposal, the East-West train would become a local on the Capitol Corridor, allowing stops at stations not currently served by rail, such as Dixon and East Davis.

Suisun City Amtrak Station-- Capitol Corridor



This is where the line would start. In the area between the tracks and the chain link fence in the distance, we're suggesting a third track and a low platform similar to the existing platforms.



The Suisun Wye connects the NWP to the Capitol Corridor. A short section of track from the Suisun Wye to the Suisun station would keep the DMU entirely separate from Capitol Corridor and UP freight trains, greatly simplifying regulatory approvals.

The station area could be improved by transit-oriented development, building on land on the west side of the tracks that is poorly utilized now. A pedestrian overcrossing of the tracks would connect this development and the adjacent Solano County Government Center to the existing Capitol Corridor station.

Low-Lying Tracks



Unlike Highway 37, it is relatively easy to build up the height of the rails, when needed in response to sea level rise. An embankment can be gradually created at night by placing gravel under the tracks, while trains continue to operate in the daytime.

Napa River Bridge



There are two bridges on the East-West alignment. This one seems to be in pretty good condition.

Napa Junction- Transfer to Napa & Vallejo



Napa Junction is where the tracks connect to rail lines going north to St. Helena and south to Vallejo. We foresee a transfer platform, enabling east-west passengers to go north-south, or vice versa.

Sonoma Raceway



After Napa Junction, a special event stop would be built at the Sonoma Raceway. The Capitol Corridor has already provided train service to a few NASCAR races. We see this as a regular feature. The tracks go right past the Main Gate.

Sonoma Raceway Main Gate

The train platform would be on the right



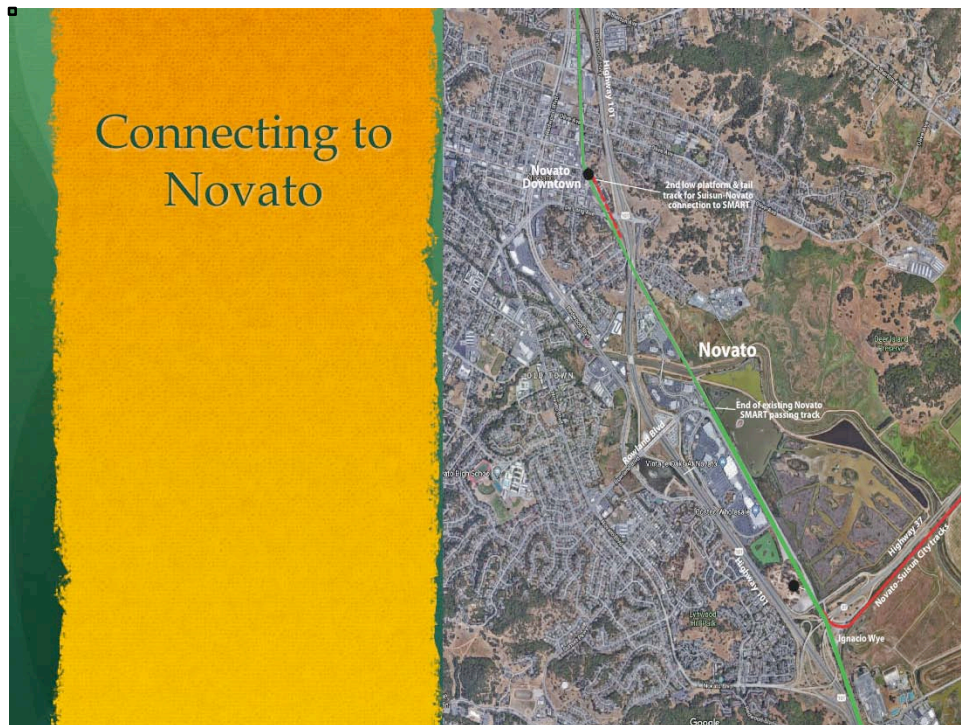
Here's a ground-level view, with the main gate on the left, and the train tracks to the right of Highway 121.

Black Point Swing Bridge

Petaluma River



The Black Point bridge is a serviceable swing bridge, but is probably not optimal long-term. This is an investment to consider down the road...



We picked downtown Novato as an appropriate terminus for this East West train, because it would not require any capital improvements to the SMART line. A stretch of passing siding is located on both sides of the Ignacio Wye. This should make it much easier to fit East-West trains into slots in SMART's schedule.

Downtown Novato Terminus

A low-level platform for transfers to SMART



We see a low-level platform being built, along with a pocket track, to enable the East West trains to get off the SMART mainline. Passengers would wait here for a SMART train going north or south, as needed. Schedules would be coordinated to minimize waits.

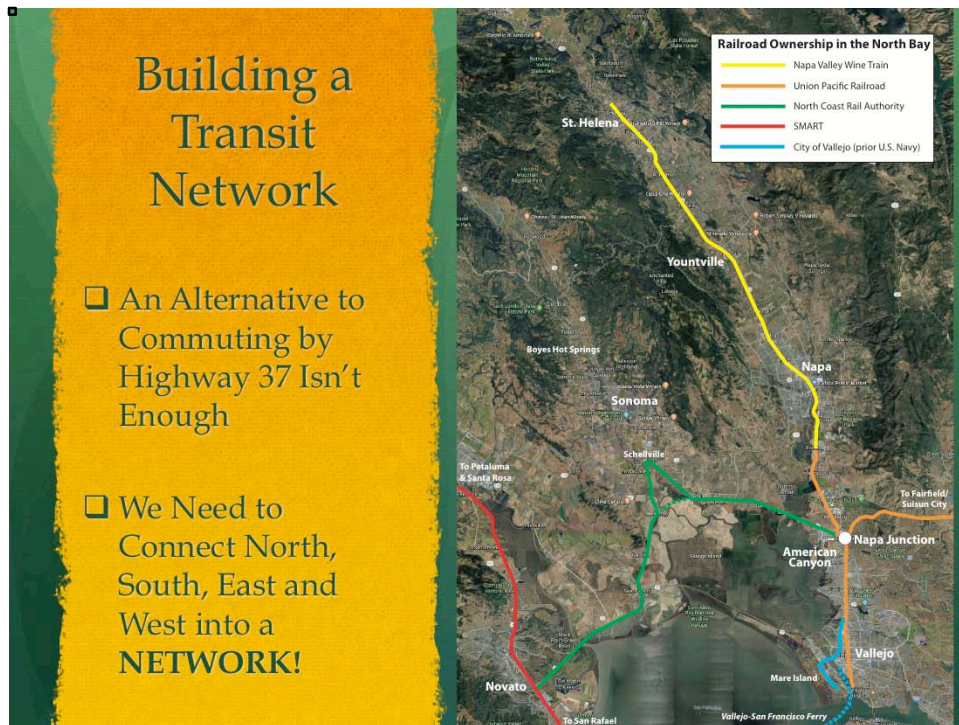
Napa-Fairfield-Vallejo “Triangle” Largest Sources of Commute & Other Trips

NORTH BAY RAIL VISION: Estimated 2015 Commute Trips To/From Selected County Subdivisions

FROM	TO										
County Subdivision (CCD)	Vacaville	Fairfield-Suisun	Vallejo-Benicia	Napa	St. Helena	Sonoma (city)	Novato	San Rafael	Petaluma	Santa Rosa/Rohnert Park	TOTAL
Vacaville CCD			1,965	1,627	82	154	139	220	246	10	4,843
Fairfield-Suisun CCD			4,395	4,131	227	403	315	472	565	668	11,176
Vallejo-Benicia CCD				5,283	236	900	862	1,325	836	683	10,125
Napa CCD	732	1,576	2,291		3,708		611	811	1,111	1,365	12,205
St. Helena CCD	21	40	37	542		49	17	34			740
Sonoma (city) CCD	35	113	206					433			787
Novato CCD	59	116	119	359	20	284					1,157
San Rafael CCD	61	90	101	203	45	120					720
Petaluma CCD	182	256	36	1,049	211						2,134
Santa Rosa/Rohnert Park CCD	366	367	576	1,106							2,415
TOTAL	1,456	2,558	10,426	14,300	4,529	1,910	1,944	3,295	2,758	3,126	

Blue shading indicates trips not served by proposed rail, already served by SMART, or travel times not competitive with driving.
Source: U.S. Census. <http://onthermap.ces.census.gov>

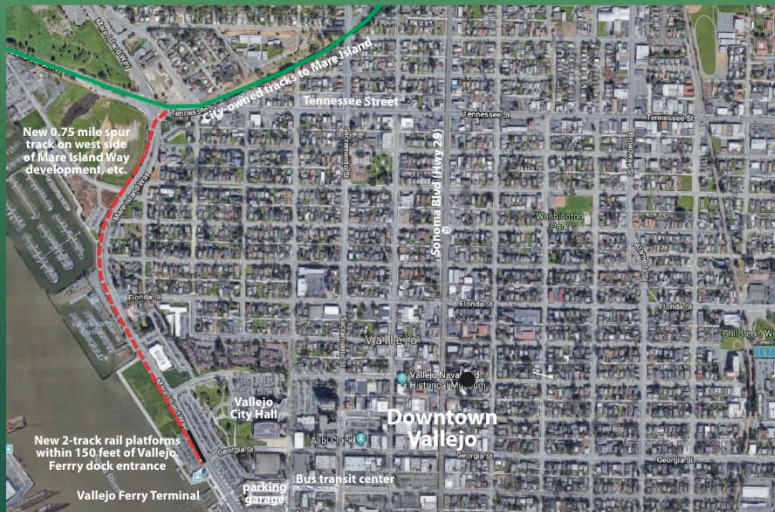
We started out thinking only about a transit alternative to commuting over Highway 37. That went out the window, however, when we saw the census data for commute trips. It's clear from this table that the largest numbers of North Bay commuters by far are coming from the Napa-Fairfield-Vallejo triangle, and going to the triangle. See the first four columns of numbers and the first four rows. The numbers for Triangle to Triangle commutes are an order of magnitude higher than the Highway 37 numbers. There's definitely a market for connecting Napa and Vallejo to Fairfield/Suisun and SMART.



What that table tells us is that the North Bay has been a missed opportunity for transit. Napa's very high level of tourism is an opportunity that would appeal to a private-sector rail operator. Tourists connecting by the Vallejo ferry from San Francisco would love to be able to take the train to tastings at various wineries. No more designated drivers! Wineries would promote themselves by providing van service from their local station.

It's possible the private-sector operator would be interested in implementing the entire network, if sweetened by the public sector in a public private partnership. The key to maximizing ridership is to schedule easy and fast transfers between the trains, and between trains and connecting local buses. We'd like to see a government agency either buy or secure operating rights on the remaining tracks owned by Union Pacific.

Extend Existing Tracks to Vallejo Ferry Terminal



While existing tracks connect to the City of Vallejo, they don't currently go all the way to the ferry terminal. A ferry connection is needed to make the line to the Napa Valley economically feasible. The City of Vallejo already owns the tracks that used to serve the Mare Island Naval Base. These could be extended to the ferry.

Possible Rail Terminus

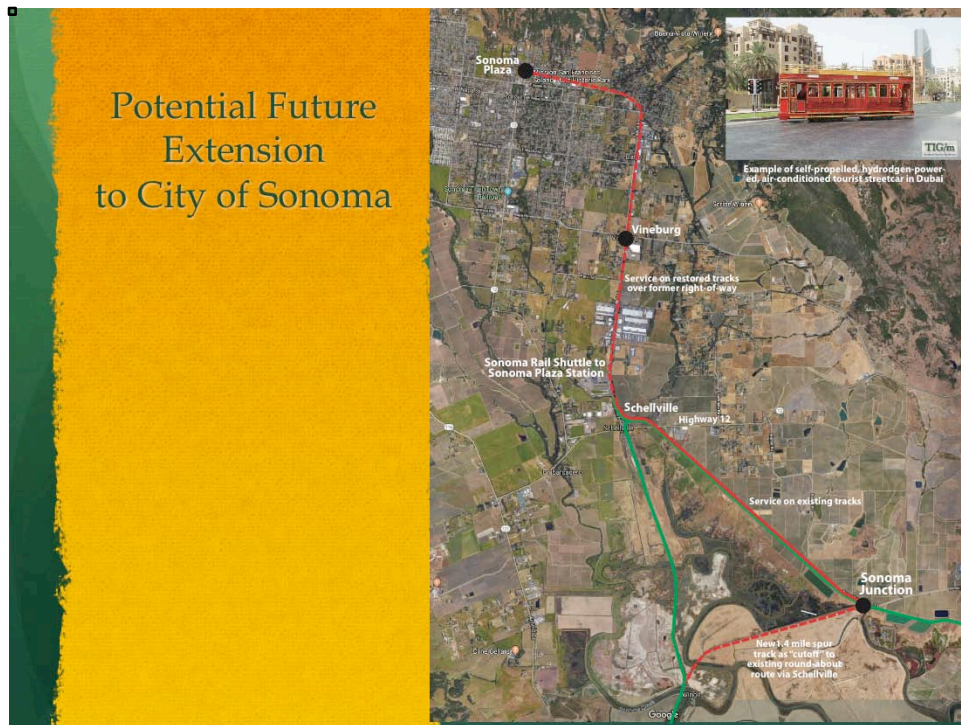


This is the Vallejo Ferry Terminal. City Hall is nearby, as is the bus transit station. A train stop could be located right here.

Interim Rail-Ferry Connection Mare Island



If permission for a short stretch of new track can be secured, TRAC believes it is feasible to provide interim rail service to the ferry dock on Mare Island, using the existing City-owned tracks that go over the Mare Island Causeway. This would enable a low-cost “testing of the waters” to gauge the passenger demand, before committing to the investment in the track extension to the Vallejo Ferry Terminal.



A future possibility is restoring rail service to the City of Sonoma. Much of the right of way is still owned by the public. For the initial service, however, we suggest reestablishing the historic bypass at Sonoma Junction, to shorten the circuitous route via Schellville. The historic embankment across the wetlands still exists, and is apparently in State ownership. A rail shuttle could connect downtown Sonoma to Sonoma Junction, to transfer to the East-West train. Note the photo of the hydrogen powered streetcar, a fun idea for this service. Battery-powered trams are now common, as well.

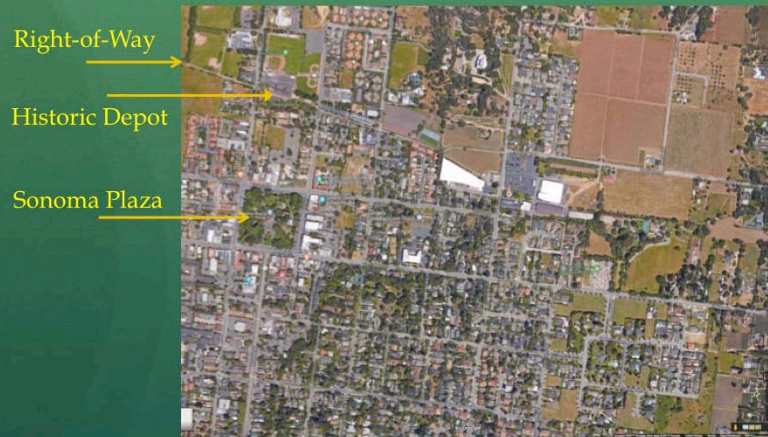
Sonoma Junction

(For the bypass, turn left before the barn)



Here's Sonoma Junction! The historic embankment is on the left, between the two trees marked by a telephone pole.

Downtown Sonoma



The Sonoma Plaza is a big tourist attraction.

Historic Sonoma Depot and right-of-way



Tracks would have to be laid where there are currently walking paths, but that's all part of the fun of restoring railbanked lines.

Other TRAC Activities

PAGE 4: TRAC'S PLAN TO INTEGRATE SAN JOAQUINS & ACE

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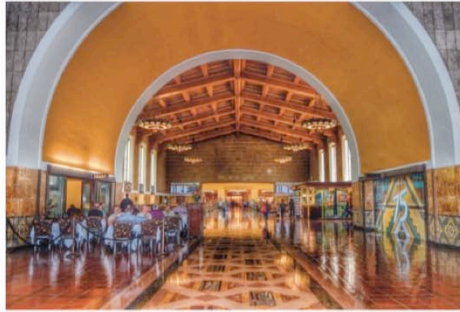
Metro: Transit Provider or Developer? -- LA Union Station Quandary

By Susan MacAdams
TRAC Board Member

Los Angeles Union Station, one of the great train stations in America, is undergoing a hugely ambitious redevelopment scheme called "LINK US," formerly known as "The Union Station Master Plan" and the "Southern California Regional Interconnector Project" or SCRIP. This project is intended to expand station capacity to handle much larger passenger volumes. First, to improve passenger access to the tracks, it would reconfigure access, adding a large amount of retail development under the tracks; second, it would incorporate run-through tracks for Amtrak, Metrolink and high speed rail.

The Proposal

Currently the station is stub-ended; trains enter the station area to pick up and drop off passengers, then exit in the reverse direction. Run-



Los Angeles Union Station, view through Main Waiting Room to train boarding area.

Photo By Anna Weis. Used with permission.

In addition to working on proposals like this one, TRAC also produces a newspaper. See links to our archive.

TRAC's Far North Proposal

We are also working on other proposals, including this one to provide service to the rural areas, using low-floor DMUs to keep costs down. With a much lower population density, keeping costs low for this service area is crucial.

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We're making a presentation soon to the JPA that runs the San Joaquin intercity service. This proposal would create a new fast corridor connecting Tracy and Fremont, leading to all-day service between the Central Valley and the Bay Area.

Thank you for your interest.

Train Riders Association of California

www.CalRailNews.org

We'd like your help in making this all happen.